



Magazine
Terminal damage
The human cost of 50 years
of expansion at Heathrow



Weekend
For richer or poorer
What's the price of wedded
bliss in the Nineties?



THE INDEPENDENT

No 2,978

4 MAY 1996

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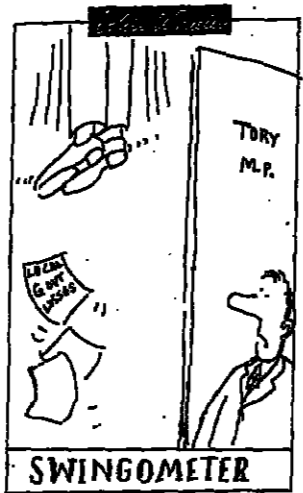
Major: I will win general election

DONALD MACINTYRE
and NICHOLAS TIMMINS

An unbowed John Major yesterday declared that the Tories would still win the general election - despite the second worst defeat in local government history inflicted on his party. The Prime Minister pledged to let Parliament run its full course before going to the country.

Mr Major, convinced that the threat to his own leadership is now lifted, said: "We have another year of this Parliament left. I went the whole five years in the last Parliament and I won... let the people judge us on what we have done at the end of our term of office when we will lay before them all the things we have achieved."

As Tory strategists absorbed the shock of losing 567 council seats in every part of the country, Mr Major firmly blamed the "ruin" inflicted by the "difficult economic decisions" he had taken for a rout which wiped his party out in 20 local authorities including one-time strongholds like Basildon, the Thatcherite bastion, Peterborough, the political base of Dr Brian Mawhinney, the Conservative Party chairman, and Cherwell, in the green heart of Oxfordshire. The result put a record 210 councils under Labour control, and in 20 councils the remaining Conservative councillors were completely wiped out, leaving Frank Dobson, Labour's local government spokesman, to dub them "Tory-free zones". These included



not just traditional Labour northern strongholds but councils such as Oxford, Lincoln, Haringey, Stevenage, Hastings and Slough. The Liberal Democrats gained seven councils - taking their total to 55 - including once

Full results: page 6
Leading article: page 14

traditional Tory heartlands such as Thurbridge Wells, Woking, Wokingham and Hastings. They consolidated their position as the second party in local government, outstripping the Conservatives in both numbers of councillors and councils controlled, and raised their share of the vote on last year's local elections.

The main consolation for the Conservatives was that Labour's lead in terms of the share of the vote fell from 21 per cent last year to 16 per cent this on the BBC's analysis - underpinning the repeated warning of the Labour leader, Tony Blair, to his party not to be complacent. They also retained control of all four councils they were defending, although in Runnymede they did so only on the strength of the Mayor's casting vote.

Paddy Ashdown said the results - seven council gains, a record number of councillors and a rise on last year in share of the vote - gave the Liberal Democrats "the best general election launch pad we have ever had".

His party had beaten the Conservatives "comprehensively into third place" in local government. "We are winning where we need to win to beat the Conservatives and we have become the opposition to Labour where they govern badly in northern cities," he said, citing Manchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Tony Blair said the results were "excellent for new Labour" and "spectacularly bad for the Conservatives" who were able only to "scratch around for the odd piece of statistical comfort".

He accused the Tories of reacting with complacency and arrogance to the results that Labour, despite the scale of its gains, pointedly eschewed.

TURN TO PAGE 2

Where there are wheels, there's a way



Trick cyclist: A German stuntman, Jochen Schweizer, making a bungee jump on his mountain bike from the Hamburg television tower yesterday. He was advertising his own bungee jumping centre. Photograph: Michael Probst/AP

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See voucher on page 2

Weekend
Why there's more to William Morris than fruity wallpaper

Six years after the Booker prize, has AS Byatt lost the plot?

Travel: survivor's guide to the delights of Greece

Zoe Wanamaker: portrait of the actress as a dog

Magazine
The teenagers who run their own parliament

Why this is the moment for asparagus

UN report says Israel slaughter was deliberate

DAVID USBORNE
New York

The bombardment of a United Nations peace-keeping camp in southern Lebanon by Israeli forces last month was calculated to ensure not only that the camp itself was struck but also that the shells would fall just in front of its entrance to ensure maximum civilian casualties, a draft UN report charges.

The claim, which threatens to spark a diplomatic storm over the conduct of Israeli commanders during last month's conflict in Lebanon, is contained in a first draft of a report completed for the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, by his military adviser, General Frank Van Kappen.

"This is the most devastating item in his report," a senior UN official confirmed last night. "It seems that they knew where most of the civilians were and aimed for that area."

The UN refused last night to reveal any details of the report's content and insisted that it was still subject to changes by General Van Kappen. "The truth is that it is not ready yet," Sylvana Foa, the UN's spokeswoman said.

The UN facility at Qana, which served as the headquarters of a Fijian battalion of peace-keepers in the area, was destroyed by Israeli shells on 18 April. It was crisscrossed with Lebanese refugees and more

than 100 were killed. It appears that when the bombardment started most of the civilians were gathered just outside the entrance.

While it was widely known that General Van Kappen had concluded that the camp had been deliberately targeted in the attack, his charge that the shells were even more carefully aimed to hit the greatest number of civilians adds another powerful dimension to his conclusions.

Mitigating the evidence against Israel, however, is the revelation that Hizbollah guerrillas who had been firing Katyusha rockets into Israeli territory from a placement close to the UN camp had been running in and out of its boundary and using it as a hiding place. For this reason, it appears, the Israeli commanders considered the camp a fair target.

Moreover, General Van Kappen reportedly suggests that the Fijian commanders were fully aware of the guerrillas' presence.

Diplomats said they expected Mr Boutros-Ghali to offer an oral briefing on the General's findings to the UN Security Council on Monday afternoon. Israel has been given until noon on Monday to offer fresh evidence contradicting General Van Kappen. Failing that, his report is expected to stand as now drafted.

It is unclear what will happen to the report itself.

Thousands are addicted to lottery, Camelot admits

PETER VICTOR

Camelot, the National Lottery operator, admitted yesterday that thousands of people have become addicted to the game.

Louise White, Camelot's public affairs manager, told delegates to a Scottish conference on the lottery: "Socially there have been obvious areas of concern, particularly with regard to addiction and underage playing."

The Methodist Church welcomed the admission as "an acknowledgement of reality".

Speaking in Edinburgh, Ms White added: "The addiction problem does exist. There is undoubtedly a small percentage

of players who are unfortunately spending more than they should on the lottery." Ms White agreed later at a news conference that even a tiny percentage of the playing population could mean there were many thousands of addicts.

Her comments came on the eve of today's rollover draw which carries an estimated jackpot of £20 million. But the main cause for concern, she said, were the Instant scratch-cards.

David Deeks, co-ordinating secretary on church and social matters for the Methodists, said: "We have said from the very beginning that the introduction of Instant scratch-cards

to the National Lottery a way of gambling which is known to be compulsive."

Methodists have called for the abolition of scratch-cards, but short of that they want the minimum age for players to be raised from 16 to 18 and television advertising to be banned.

Leading clerics from all denominations are united over their concerns surrounding the lottery and a group representing the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland has already met Virginia Bottomley, the National Heritage Secretary, to voice their fears. Anonymous would not be drawn on the controversy, but a spokesman for

Oflot, the National Lottery regulator, said: "The Director General has a duty not to license any game which he considers will contribute to excessive play. He has not licensed any such game." Seven scratchcard surveys, involving 13,000 people, had been carried out Oflot's behalf, but findings to date were "unreliable".

"The picture is becoming clearer, but what we can say is that there is no evidence of addiction in this country," said the spokesman. "Oflot has discussed the possibility of addiction with Gamblers' Anonymous and other counselling groups and asked to be advised of any information."

Big chill for the bank holiday

The bank holiday started in predictable fashion yesterday with packed airports, jams on roads to the coast and the prospect of miserable weather.

An Arctic chill blowing in from the North Sea promises temperatures no higher than 10C across England and Wales. Scotland has been warned to brace itself for wintry showers. Today's weather is expected to start cold and frosty with showers developing to put a damper on outdoor activities.

The outlook for tomorrow and Monday is slightly more optimistic, with rain in the north and bright and mainly dry

weather in the south. It will stay chilly.

With weather like that to look forward to, around 250,000 British sunseekers fled yesterday for foreign hotspots. For those stuck at home, motoring organisations warned of serious congestion over the weekend even though roads have been removed and roadworks suspended on many main routes.

"With the weather so unpleasant there has been a last-minute rush to head off somewhere warmer this weekend," said Keith Barton, head of corporate affairs at the Association of British Travel

Agents. "Spain and Portugal are favourite destinations and many people are also taking a city break, with Paris, Amsterdam, Venice and Rome popular."

Ferry company Stena said it was carrying about 100,000 passengers on its continental routes and about 50,000 on its Irish Sea crossings, while the AA said it expected nearly five million drivers to hit the road over the Bank Holiday weekend.

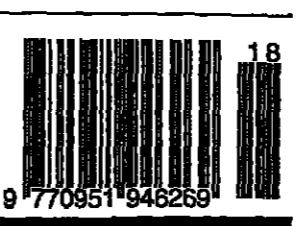
Last year's May Day weekend, which featured celebrations for the 50th anniversary of VE Day, was greeted by temperatures up to 28C (82F).

Forecast, page 2

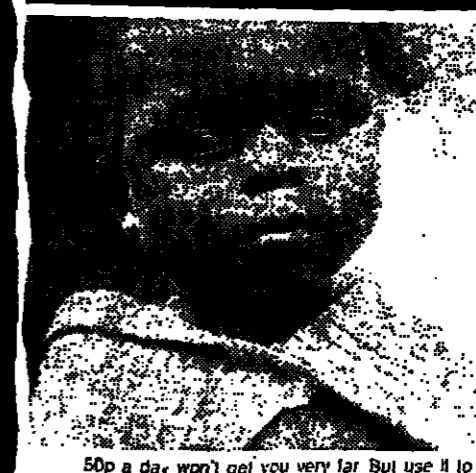
IN BRIEF

Boy sent back
A ten-year-old Zulu boy was heading for South Africa after his white foster mother's attempt to keep him in Britain failed. Page 3

Land-mine decision
The UN Inhumane Weapons Convention conference ended without a total ban on anti-personnel land mines. Page 10



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HIV kit falsely cleared four victims of virus

LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

Four people who tested negative for HIV with a faulty testing kit have been told they are infected with the virus, the Department of Health revealed yesterday.

No details of the four individuals have been released, but efforts to trace their sexual contacts to offer them HIV tests are now underway.

The confirmation of the false negatives follows the re-testing of more than 20,000 blood samples tested for HIV between July 1995 and March this year, with the IMX HIV 1/2 3rd generation kit.

Sir Kenneth Calman, the Chief Medical Officer, said in a statement: "I would like to extend my sympathies to [the four] individuals in what must be a very difficult situation."

The IMX kit, one of several used by the NHS, was withdrawn from sale worldwide on 25 March by its manufacturers, Abbott Laboratories Ltd in Chicago, after some European laboratories reported inaccurate results with it. A doctor in Portsmouth was among the first to query its reliability when a patient he knew to have full-blown AIDS tested negative.

News of the kit's withdrawal was leaked at the start of the Easter bank holiday when clinics and GP surgeries were closed, leaving thousands of people - initial estimates suggested that up to 40,000 were at risk - desperate for more information and advice.

Aids charities were inundated with calls, and health ministers were severely criticised for sitting on information about the faulty kits for a week as the Department of Health tried to organise re-testing facilities before making an announcement.

The Department said that since July last year a total of 23,620 blood samples in the UK had tested negative using the IMX kit. All available stored samples - 20,900 - had been re-tested and four of the negative results found to be wrong.

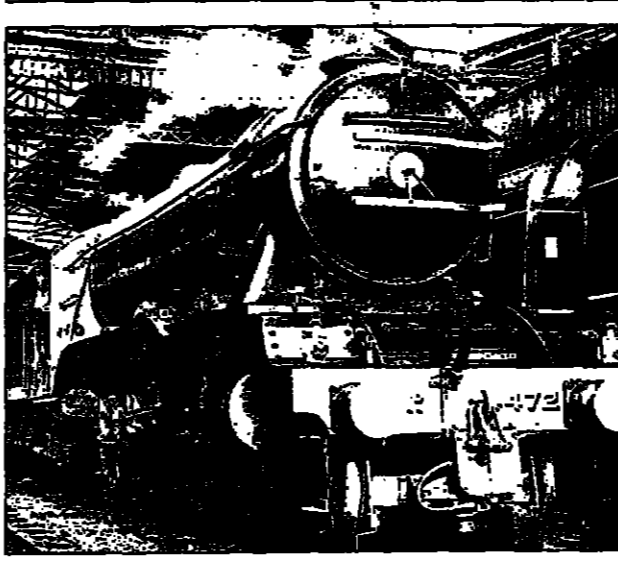
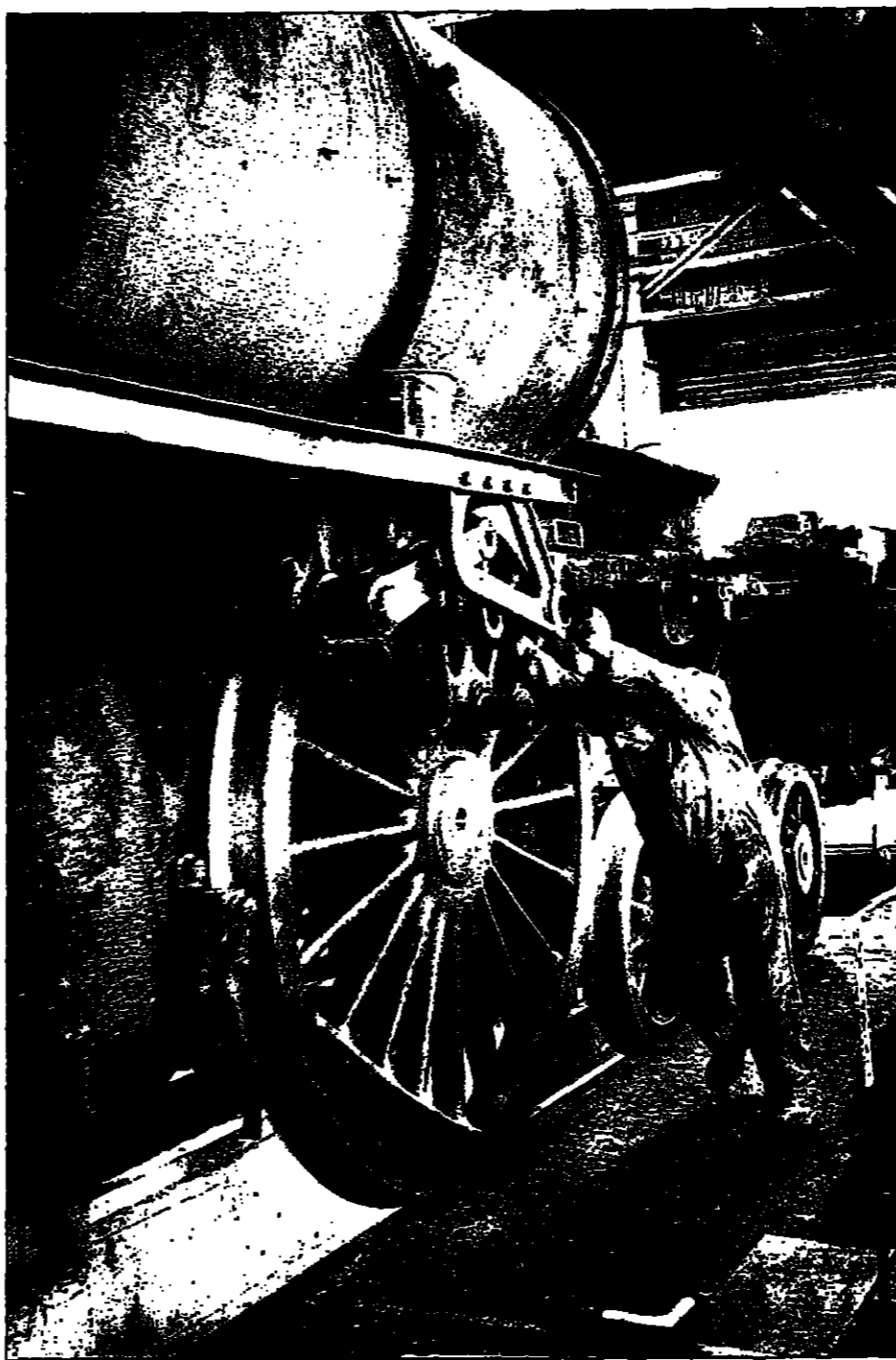
Stored samples were not available to re-test the remaining 2,720 negative results. About 800 of these were done in NHS clinics and the people concerned had been invited to provide fresh blood samples. The remaining 1,920 samples were provided for private tests, mainly for insurance purposes and visa applications on behalf of people considered to be at low risk of HIV infection.

It is believed that only people with a very high number of antibodies to HIV in their blood were at risk of testing negative instead of positive with the IMX test. Antibody status may be related to the stage of infection with people only recently exposed to HIV and those on the verge of AIDS being most likely to fit this profile.

Tom Lawson, spokesman for the Terrence Higgins Trust, said the Government had done well to carry out the re-testing of samples quickly. However, he said there were lessons to be learned about the Department's co-ordination with journalists and support groups during a public health crisis.

"Four people who re-tested positive is four people too many. We have to ensure nothing like this is going to happen again," Mr Lawson said. "It must be enormously distressing for the people concerned. This is a terrible way to learn that you are HIV positive."

A spokesman for Abbott Laboratories Ltd in Chicago said last night that more than 2.5 million tests had been carried out worldwide with the IMX kit. The company had, until yesterday, been aware of one confirmed false negative in the UK and three others in Spain and France.



Scotsman to fly once more

A volunteer at work (above) on the legendary Flying Scotsman, which is being restored to its original condition (left) under the supervision of a new owner, businessman Dr Tony Marchington. The project - carried out by volunteer enthusiasts - will take another two years to complete, but the locomotive - designed by Sir Nigel Gresley and built in 1923 - should be back on the rails in 1998. Photograph: Alison McDougall

5,000 jobs go in merger

PETER RODGERS
and NIC CIGUTTI

Royal Insurance and Sun Alliance yesterday announced a surprise £6bn merger to produce the UK's largest general insurer in a move that will cost 5,000 jobs over the next two years. The new Royal Sun Alliance will be Britain's largest household insurer with about a fifth of the market, and in car insurance will come a close second to Direct Line.

The agreed merger is the biggest reshuffling of the pack in the UK insurance market for more than a decade and is aimed at cutting costs at a time of fierce competition, as well as combining forces to expand overseas markets. The City saw the merger plan as the start of a new wave of consolidation in the UK market, encouraging speculation that names such as GRE, Commercial Union and General Accident could be caught up in takeover fever.

Most of the job losses will come from the merged group's 28,000 UK employees, and the cuts are part of a plan to save £175m a year from 1998. Roger Taylor, the £375,000-a-year chief executive of Sun Alliance, who is to be executive deputy chairman, said most staff cuts would be voluntary and through normal turnover, but did not rule out compulsory redundancies.

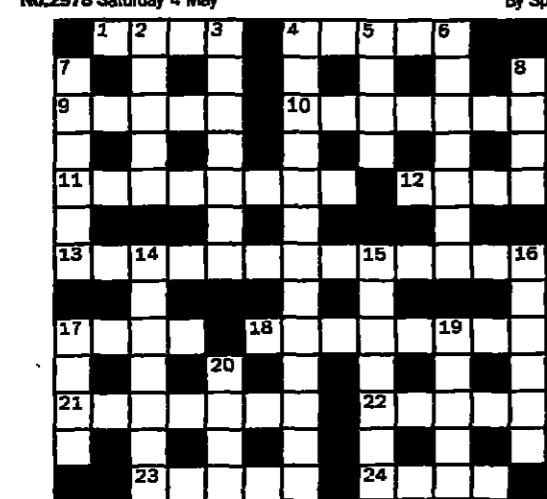
Roger Lyons, general secretary of Manufacturing Science Finance - the insurance industry union - attacked the jobs threat. "We are seeking urgent discussions. There is certainly no 'feelgood factor' amongst insurance staff today," Michael Meacher, Labour's employment spokesman, called for an Office of Fair Trading inquiry into the merger.

Full story, page 18
Comment, page 19

concise crossword

No. 2978 Saturday 4 May

By Spurius



ACROSS

- 1 Exalted (4)
- 4 Uncertainty (5)
- 9 Synthetic material (5)
- 10 Small settlement (7)
- 11 Selfless behaviour (8)
- 12 Slender (4)
- 13 Catering establishment (9,4)
- 17 Irish parliament (4)
- 18 Applause (8)
- 21 Adage (7)
- 22 Snow leopard (5)
- 23 Before time (5)
- 24 Land measure (4)

DOWN

- 2 Creek (5)
- 3 Inhibitions (4-3)
- 5 Where voting takes place at Westminster (8,5)
- 6 Windpipe (7)
- 7 Whole (6)
- 8 Age (4)
- 14 Fat (7)
- 15 Type of pudding (7)
- 16 Information (4)
- 19 Interior (5)
- 20 River in NE England (4)

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:

ACROSS: 1 Brighden, 5 Rock (Brighden Rock), 9 Lie-In, 10 Virtual, 11 Partridge, 12 Stinging nettle, 16 Cerebellum, 20 Against, 21 Point, 22 Lynx, 23 Platonic, 24 Down.

Notes

Weather forecast

NOON FORECAST

Learn from the old, avoid the new.

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WORLD WEATHER

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Sacked jails chief gets £220,000

Sacked prisons chief Derek Lewis yesterday accepted a £220,000 pay-off from the Home Office after a lengthy legal battle.

The former director-general of the Prison Service was fired from his £125,000-a-year job by the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, in the wake of the damning Learmont report into the escape of dangerous inmates from Parkhurst jail. He is also understood to have been paid costs of around £50,000.

The settlement falls short, however, of Mr Lewis's original claim for £300,000.

A Home Office statement confirmed that legal wrangling over compensation dating back to last October had ended in agreement. "The Home Office

has agreed to pay Derek Lewis £220,000 plus costs, without admitting liability, in settlement of his claim for compensation following his dismissal without notice."

"The payment compensates Mr Lewis only for the loss of earnings and other benefits which he would have obtained had he been allowed to serve a full notice period and for other incidental expenses."

Mr Lewis said in a statement that he was "very pleased" with the settlement.

It is understood that he has agreed to drop his industrial tribunal claim for unfair dismissal as part of the deal. The payment is expected to be formally endorsed at a High Court hearing on Tuesday.

Major shrugs off poll rout

FROM PAGE 1

"This was not a general election," he said, "and we take nothing whatever for granted."

But Mr Major said: "People have, for as far back as you can go since the second World War, chosen by-elections and local council elections to protest against the government of the day," he told ITN.

"There are millions and millions of people who will go out and vote Conservative at the next General Election who chose not to do so yesterday."

Mr Major was said by aides to be confident that the moment of maximum danger to his leadership had now passed - not least because of the two per cent in-

provement to 27 per cent in the Tories' still dismal vote share since last year.

While the whole thrust of Mr Major's remarks indicated that the essentials of his party's course between now and the election was in place, that was sharply questioned by his right wing critics. John Redwood will publish his own alternative manifesto after urging the Government to take heed of the concerns of Tory supporters who Mr Major acknowledged had "set in their hands".

A 30,000-word document, called Action Not Words, will give substance to the policies Mr Redwood is urging Mr Major to adopt, on the health service, taxation and Europe.

IN BRIEF

Package blown up in Barclays scare

Two controlled explosions were carried out yesterday on a suspect package found outside a branch of Barclays. The package turned out later to be a bag of rubbish, but a bank spokesman said: "You cannot take any chances."

The two detonations were carried out by explosives experts as fire and ambulance services were called to the scene. Road surrounding the bank in Westbridge, Surrey, were closed as the area sealed off.

An extortionist calling himself March Gra has posted or planted 25 devices to Barclays over the last 16 months. In an incident two weeks ago a device exploded outside a branch in Ealing, west London.

Runaway captured

A convicted child molester who absconded from a secure hospital unit a week ago has been arrested at a seaside boarding house. Humber police said Peter Doseena, 64, was arrested at Caernarfon, north Wales, after absconding while walking in the grounds of the hospital near Hull as part of his rehabilitation. Doseena, who has spent 27 years in Broadmoor, was collected by hospital staff.

Paper apologises

The Catholic Herald apologised for running an article accusing the late Archbishop of Liverpool of driving people away from the church. Harry Coen, the paper's assistant editor, said he had made an error of judgment in using the piece by the novelist Alice Thomas Ellis, which he admitted had caused distress. Ms Ellis claimed Archbishop Derek Worlock, who died of cancer in February, had caused a slump in Liverpool mass attendances.

Crisis on yacht

Dwindling supplies may force a British yachtsman to abandon her bid to become the first woman to circle the globe non-stop against prevailing winds. Samantha Brewster, 28, is nearing the Cape of Good Hope after an 11,000-mile haul through the Antarctic Ocean in temperatures as low as -20C. She is battling technical and equipment problems caused by howling southern winds, which have torn ropes and sails.

Fire victim has baby

A mother is fighting for her life after giving birth to a daughter almost four days after being badly injured in a house blaze. Debbie Garbutt, 32, suffered 50 per cent burns in the fire which killed her four-year-old daughter Jade on Monday. Doctors at Pinderfields Hospital, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, delivered her unborn child by Caesarian section. The 3lb 3oz premature baby is stable in the neo-natal intensive care unit at Leeds General Infirmary.

Divorce law delay

Ireland's Supreme Court reserved judgment on a legal challenge to last year's referendum decision allowing a divorce law to be passed. Anti-divorce campaigner Des Hanafin appealed against a High Court ruling rejecting his claim that the narrow referendum vote for divorce was influenced by government promotional spending later declared anti-constitutional. The five judges will deliver their verdict later this month.

Hospital death fall

A 12-year-old girl has died after falling from a hospital escalator. Stacey Newey, of Greenwich, south-east London, was rushed to Greenwich District Hospital's casualty department with serious head injuries, and died soon afterwards. A spokesman for Greenwich Healthcare Trust said: "Police, who aren't treating Stacey's death as suspicious, believe she was playing on the escalator but lost her grip and fell off, falling several floors."

Seen and heard

Pictures of cows are being painted on a road through grassland near Stroud, Gloucestershire, to warn drivers that cattle roam freely. They replace the traditional upright warning signs on poles, which the animals rubbed against and demolished.

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مكتبة المجلد

As her 'son' is flown to Africa, a white foster mother vows to get him back

Zulu boy flies home after last plea fails

MICHAEL STREETER

A ten-year-old Zulu boy was heading for South Africa last night after a last attempt by his white foster mother to keep him in Britain was rejected by the Government and the Court of Appeal.

Campaigners for the boy and the white woman had hoped the Attorney General Sir Nicholas Lyell would let him stay while appeals were made to the European Commission on Human Rights in Strasbourg.

But in an unprecedented move the Attorney rejected a specific request from the President of the Commission, known as a Rule 36 indication, to suspend the order for the boy to leave.

A spokesman for Sir Nicholas said it was the first time the Government had turned down a Rule 36 indication, but this was because it was "unprecedented" for such a request to be made in proceedings involving private parties.

"The British Government is not a party to these proceedings. When it is a matter in which the Government is concerned, it is our invariable policy to comply," he said. However, the Commission's decision to intervene in the case showed their deep concern about possible infringement of the boy's and the woman's "family" rights.

The Government's decision, backed by the Court of Appeal, meant that the boy was reunited with his natural mother at the offices of the Official Solicitor in central London. He was due to leave on a flight back to his native Transvaal last night or some time today.

Public relations consultant Max Clifford, who has worked without payment for the boy and his foster mother, said: "I saw them the other night and they are both heartbroken by what is happening. He is a very

bright young lad.

"He had a farewell party and one of the girls from his school had a card with a picture of a judge with horns."

Mr Clifford added: "As far as I know the fight will still go on to let him live here."

The boy, who cannot be named while in this country, was brought to the UK by the white woman, a British citizen with an Afrikaans background. She wanted him to be adopted as a member of her family and to live with her in Maida Vale, London, and be educated at a leading British school.

His natural mother, who worked as a housekeeper and nanny for the British woman, initially agreed to the adoption but later changed her mind.

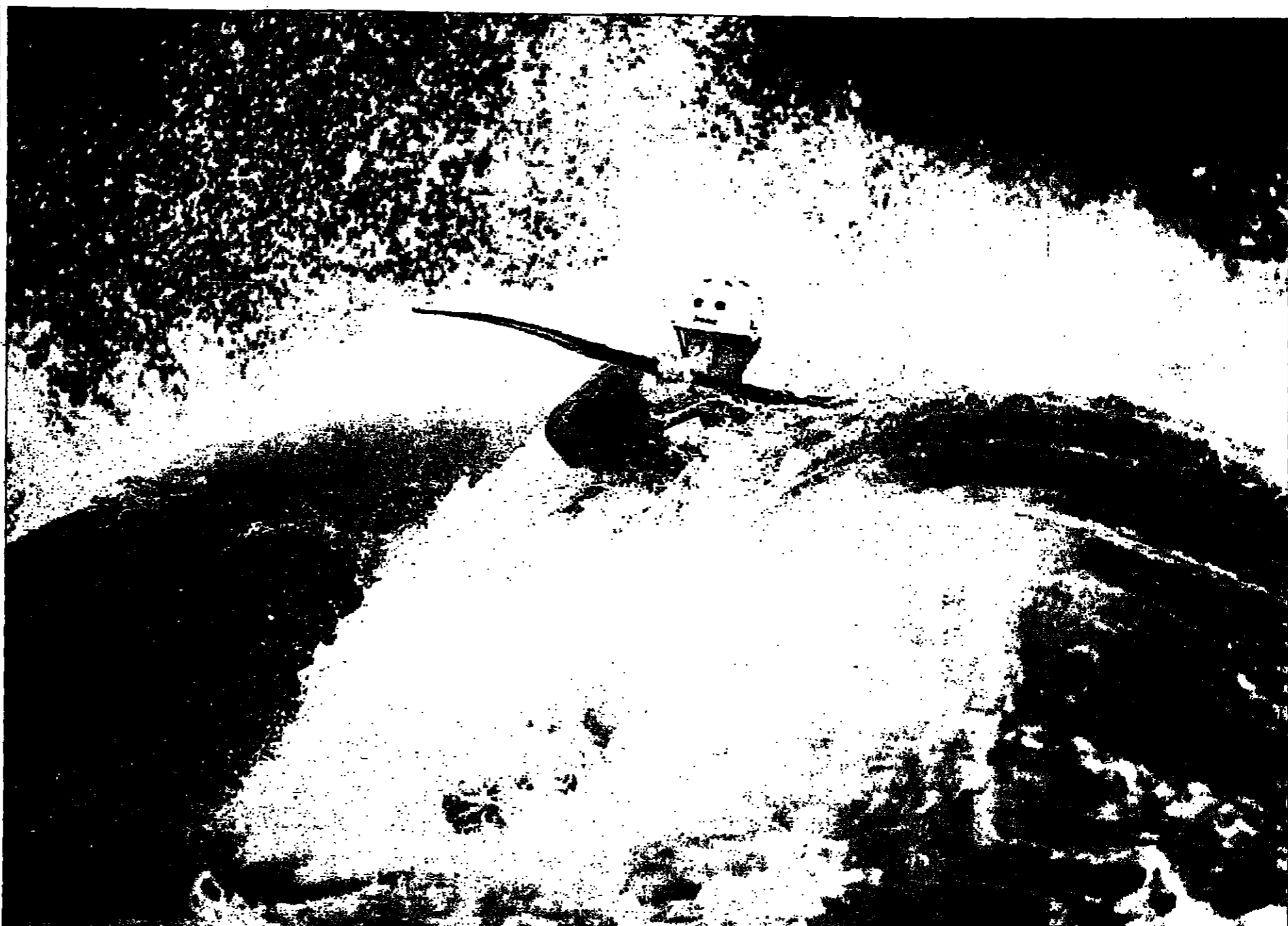
Earlier court hearings were told that to get around apartheid laws, the white woman had taken responsibility for the boy when he was an infant so that he could stay in her home, while his mother had her quarters elsewhere.

When the woman decided to come to Britain in 1992, the boy's parents signed a document which gave permission for him to go too. But when his natural mother was later questioned by social workers she said she wanted her son back and did not want him to be adopted.

Last week in a private hearing the Law Lords backed an earlier Court of Appeal order to send the boy back to South Africa and said that the boy, who has forgotten how to speak Zulu, would be better off with his natural parents. Last night spokesman Max Clifford said the foster mother was "absolutely devastated" by her parting with the ten-year-old.

"It was a very emotional farewell and she is naturally distraught," he said. "She is going to carry on the fight however she wants him back."

Polly Toynbee, page 15



Riding high: Canoeist John-Paul Ealock, based at the Twy-Felin training centre, caught taking a wave while practising for the "Cuervo Bitches Rodeo", an international canoeing competition being held off the Pembrokeshire coast at Ramsey Sound this weekend
Photograph: Rob Stratton

Al Fayed buys Viva! radio for £3m

MARIANNE MACDONALD
Media Correspondent

Mohammed Al Fayed has bought the troubled women's radio station Viva Radio for £3m in a bid to expand his nascent media empire, it was announced yesterday.

Vival 963 was Britain's first radio station for women, launched last July by PR guru Lynne Frank, Debbie Owen, literary agent and wife of Lord Owen, and Labour Party fundraiser Barbara Follett.

It plunged into trouble after it failed to pull in its target 400,000 listeners and has struggled with money and reception

problems — across half its London area — which made it effectively unviable.

In January it was forced to make cutbacks and has been operating since on a skeleton staff from its offices near Marble Arch, west London.

Its latest blow came in March when RAIAR's official listening figures showed it was the least popular in London, with less than a third of the following of stations like Spectrum, aimed at ethnic minorities.

In all it was pulling only 59,000 listeners for around 20 minutes a day, research which may have finally persuaded its owners, Golden Rose Com-

munications, to sell.

However, Golden Rose, which also owns another troubled station, Jazz FM, must now gain shareholder approval for the deal.

Richard Wheatly, chief executive of Golden Rose, said: "We welcome Liberty's involvement in the London radio market with their acquisition of Viva! The resources which Liberty will be able to apply to Viva! I feel confident will, following an anticipated relaunch, result in success."

Stewart Steven, former editor of London's *Evening Standard*, now the chairman of Liberty, described the purchase

of Viva as "a small but significant building block in the company's plan to create a new and independent media company in Britain".

Under the terms of the licence Liberty is obliged to continue to aim the station at women aged 24 to 44, and it says that Viva! will stay on air while relaunch plans are finalised.

It will not be an easy task to turn Viva! around after an almost blanket thumbs down to the new concept of radio for women. Even Viva's own initial research showed that women were surprisingly unliberalised when it came to radio listening: if their male partner did not like

it they would turn it off.

Their research also showed that women would not listen to a station which smacked of feminism or was "anti-men".

The bid by Mr Al Fayed, the owner of Harrods, follows his recent acquisition of the defunct *Punch* magazine for £500,000.

He adds Viva! to his media company, Liberty Publishing, after having been foiled in his attempts to acquire London News Radio. *Today* newspaper, which Rupert Murdoch chose instead to close — the *Daily Express* and *The Observer*, for which he offered the Guardian Media Group £20m.

Comment, page 15

Inspector of schools is accused of bias

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

The Chief Inspector of Schools was forced to defend himself against accusations of political bias yesterday as local authorities released details of a report on reading standards which they said had been given a negative spin.

Inspectors who carried out the inquiry into reading in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Islington and Southwark had had the final draft of their work changed.

The charge was denied by the chief inspector, Chris Woodhead, who said the data in both versions was consistent.

"If it is political to write as clearly as we can about the fact that significant numbers of children from our most disadvantaged communities are not learning to read then I would like somebody to explain what the word 'political' means," he said.

Reading scores collected during the inspection showed that eight out of 10 pupils were below average, but in government tests only three out of 10 had failed to reach expected levels. The inspectors' results were in the report but the discrepancy was not highlighted.

The boroughs, which were sent a copy of the report, said that a sentence which said reading was "well organised in three out of five classes" was altered to say that "weaknesses... affected the teaching of reading in two out of five classes."

Where reading had been classed as "satisfactory or better in approximately two thirds of the lessons" it was now "unsatisfactory or poor" in one third.

A supportive paragraph which said teachers were overwhelmingly pragmatic and non-doctrinaire had been removed.

Manager's face like a ball said Japanese boss

KATE WATSON-SMYTH

A manager demonstrated to an industrial tribunal yesterday how his Japanese boss kicked an imaginary ball into the air as he told him that his face resembled a football.

Cliff Wakeman, 42, is seeking compensation for unfair dismissal and racial discrimination from his former employers, the Tokyo-based Quick Corporation financial information company.

He showed the tribunal how Noriaki Nakajima, joint senior general manager of the company's London branch, pulled at his cheeks, saying: "You have a strange skin colour."

Mr Wakeman, formerly a £52,000-a-year deputy general manager in charge of computer development, then kicked one foot into the air to demonstrate the gesture Mr Nakajima made as he told him: "Your face looks like a rock or a football."

Mr Wakeman, from Whitstable, Kent, told the tribunal that Quick's Japanese directors

in Britain were running a "conspiracy" to prevent the advancement of his career because he was English.

"It was never possible for an English manager to reign over a Japanese manager," he said.

The directors liked to have Japanese staff in control "not so much for business operations, but for their own comfort".

Another senior employee with 20 years' experience told the tribunal he earned three times less than lower-ranking Japanese colleagues. Ashok Solanki, aged 44, from Edgware, London, an operations manager, said "the difference between British and Japanese salaries smacked of racial discrimination".

"It was beyond belief that Quick could have been treating us with such utter contempt. I was a long-standing manager and was paid under half the net income of even lower ranking Japanese managers and non-management Japanese staff."

Mr Solanki, who was made redundant after six years at

Quick, Mr Wakeman and Stewart Mitchell, aged 45, from Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, all claim racial discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Quick Corporation has admitted unfair discrimination but denied racial discrimination.

Mr Solanki fought back tears as he described how he worked 18-hour days and weekends because he was told that commitment and loyalty would advance his career.

"I was told that Quick looked after their staff and at my interview they said 'have you ever heard of a Japanese company making people redundant?' I expected to retire with them and although my previous job had paid more, I was excited by working for an international Japanese company with a long-term productive career and the prospect of never being made redundant."

But Mr Solanki said he was repeatedly passed over for promotion and a general management job was given to Japanese nationals with less experience.



Cliff Wakeman: Said he was victim of a conspiracy

Heavy-footed edible dormouse marches on

NICHOLAS SCHOON
Environment Correspondent

Frustrated householders are helping to disperse an increasingly serious pest — the fat or edible dormouse.

Ten times the weight of the native, common dormouse, its squirrel-sized cousin may be on the verge of a sudden explosion in its range.

The edible dormouse was brought to Britain from Hungary by one of the Rothschild family in 1902. Since then it has slowly spread through Chiltern woodlands in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire and a little beyond.

Sometimes it moves into house lofts in large numbers, where it will gnaw on woodwork, cable coverings and plastic garden furniture. It makes a strange, mechanical, high-pitched noise in the mating season and sounds surprisingly heavy-footed for a small, tree-dwelling mammal.

In woodlands and plantations it can strip the bark from young conifer trees, in much the



Protected: Edible dormouse is being moved illegally

same way the grey squirrel attacks broadleaved trees. "It causes considerable damage and it makes a hell of a noise," said Mike Render, forestry officer at Buckinghamshire County Council.

It is illegal to kill the creature under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 because it is endangered in its native central Europe. But under the same act, it is also illegal to move it around the country because it is an introduced species. But a

survey organised by the Mammal Society, the county council and several other organisations found evidence that people are moving the edible dormouse.

The society chairman Pat Morris says the animals were being released in Berkshire, near Oxford and in the New Forest, in Hampshire.

"It is only a matter of time before the fat dormouse and its associated problems turn up in other parts of the country," he says in *Mammal News*.

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news

Bingham tops contenders for Chief Justice

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Legal Affairs Editor

Sir Thomas Bingham, the Master of the Rolls, was yesterday emerging as a potential successor to the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, whose illness with cancer is forcing him into early retirement.

As the head of the Court of Appeal's civil division since 1992, Sir Thomas, a relatively youthful 62 but with an already formidable reputation, was being tipped as one of the strongest candidates to become the most senior criminal judge in England & Wales.

The suggestion took some lawyers by surprise yesterday because of Sir Thomas' long association with civil rather than criminal work, but this could be viewed as more than outweighed by his well-established authority and intellectual and administrative ability.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, has already begun the process of consulting the High Court heads of division, of which Sir Thomas is one, senior Lord Justices of Appeal and some of the law lords over the succession to Lord Taylor, arguably the most popular Lord

Chief Justice among lawyers and certainly the only one to have made an impression on the wider public.

Even barristers on the Bar's radical left, who view Lord Taylor as less liberal than is widely suggested, were grappling with a genuine and deep sadness about his predicament.

Fears were also being expressed about what some viewed as the most politically sensitive judicial appointment for a decade. Against the backdrop of the battle raging between senior judges and Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, over his sentencing plans, it could be the ultimate test of the degree of trust and confidence that exists between John Major and Lord Mackay, whom he must consult before making the final recommendation to the Queen.

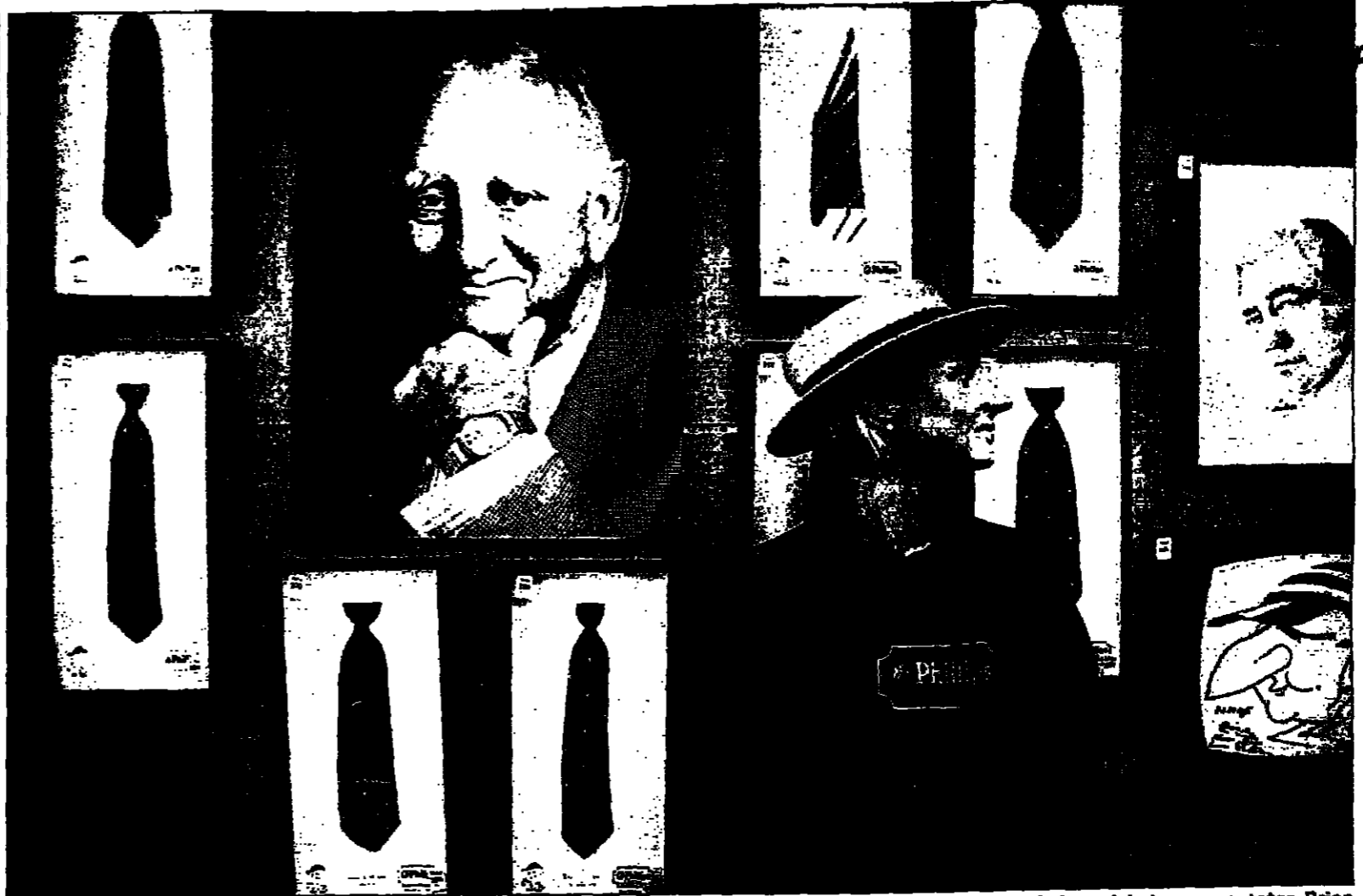
The 59-year-old Court of Appeal judge, Lord Justice Rose, another widely-tipped candidate because of his broad criminal experience and (like Lord Taylor) Northern Circuit background, has been as outspoken on the Howard plans as his chief, and was branded the equivalent of a "do-gooder" after he suggested that

mandatory life sentences for second-time rapists would lead more rapists to kill their victims.

Other suggestions yesterday included Lord Justices Auld, Simon Brown, Mustill and [Paul] Kennedy. But Sir Thomas Bingham could be the most inspired choice. He has not shirked from giving limited support for Michael Howard's sentencing reforms. He also backed Attorney General Sir Nicholas Lyell, not Sir Richard Scott, over public interest immunity.

For the Bar's radical wing, the law lord Lord Woolf, author of the Strangeways riot inquiry report, would be the dream appointment. But his shares did not appear to be rising yesterday.

Left-of-centre barristers spotlighted what they see as an unprecedented attempt by the Government to politicise law and order. Patrick O'Connor, a criminal QC, said: "It is very worrying that this dying Conservative government, which has been deeply politicising issues of law and order and encountered very effective opposition from Lord Taylor, has the power to appoint a new Lord Chief Justice who will rule over us for the next 10 years."



Wicket maiden: Sarah Harvey, of London auctioneer's Phillips, with prints and ties from the collection of the cricket commentator Brian Johnston, who died in 1994. The items, on show for a week, are part of a sale of cricket memorabilia next Saturday. Photograph: Colin McKillop

Fan's early jail release 'undermines courts'

Prison chiefs were criticised by politicians, police and magistrates last night for allowing Matthew Simmons, the soccer fan who was jailed for a week for attacking a lawyer in court, to walk free after serving less than 24 hours of his sentence.

Simmons, found guilty of provoking the infamous kung-fu kick by footballer Eric Cantona at a match last year, left Highdown Prison, Sutton, Surrey, yesterday because governors said he could not be kept in over the weekend. With automatic remission, Simmons should have been freed tomorrow, but prison chiefs said this was brought forward because, by law, inmates cannot be discharged at the weekend. The ruling was attacked by the Magistrates' Association, who said Simmons could have been kept in for a second night under recent Home Office guidelines.

The 21-year-old was jailed for contempt of court on Thursday for launching himself at prosecutor Jeffrey McCann after he was found guilty at Croydon Magistrates' Court of using threatening words and behaviour to Cantona during a match between Manchester United and Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park. Cantona made his attack in response to the taunts.

Simmons, of Thornton Heath, south London, was fined £500 and banned from every football ground in Britain - but as the guilty verdict was announced he leapt over a bench and appeared to kick Mr

McCann in the chest.

Lady Olga Maitland, the Tory MP, will table Commons questions next week about the situation. "This man displayed gross misbehaviour in court and should serve his full sentence," she said. "This is sending out entirely the wrong message by undermining the courts. We must examine our release procedures."

Chief Supt Brian Mackenzie, president of the Police Superintendents Association, condemned the way the criminal justice system was developing. "It will be causing a lot of concern and the sooner we can get sentencing straightened out and transparent, the sooner the public's confidence will be restored."

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'Loophole found' in speed camera law

Thousands of drivers could have speeding convictions overturned after the discovery of a legal loophole in existing legislation, the RAC said yesterday.

In a recent case, police speed camera evidence against a speeding motorist was deemed inadmissible because photographs were enlarged to make them more readable. Now the RAC believes thousands of other motorists convicted by cameras might be able to take advantage of the loophole.

In the specific case at Uxbridge Magistrates Court in Middlesex, a businessman was accused of exceeding a 60mph limit on the M25 in Surrey.

His solicitor successfully argued that some of the camera picture was enhanced to make the number plates more readable and that only evidence

produced directly by the speed camera was admissible.

"This type of enhancement is commonly used by police camera units throughout the country in an attempt to identify vehicles," said RAC head of campaigns Edmund King.

He went on: "Motorists concerned about their speeding prosecutions, where photographic enhancements were a factor, should in the case of fixed penalties contact the police force involved and, in court cases, contact the court involved to question the validity of their conviction."

The RAC said the confusion needed to be cleared up because speeding was the biggest single cause of death and serious injury in road accidents, and it constantly campaigned for consistent enforcement of the law.

Possible successors to Lord Taylor



Sir Thomas Bingham, 62, the Master of the Rolls. Admired for intellectual rigour and pure reason. Made a QC at 39. Caused near apoplexy at the Bar in 1991 by suggesting solicitors should appear in higher courts. More patrician than Lord Taylor.



Sir Christopher Rose, 59, Court of Appeal Judge. Has the kind of background - Morecambe Grammar School, Leeds and Oxford Universities, Northern Circuit - that stood Lord Taylor in good stead. Condemned Howard plans for sentencing repeat rapists.



Lord (Harry) Woolf, 63, a Law Lord. While once a Treasury (Government) counsel, would be a radical's choice. But most of his recommendations after the Strangeways riots have been ignored. Still involved in review of civil justice system.



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Inspectors to crack down on 'weak' schools

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

One school in 10 will be labelled as "weak" under plans for changes to the inspection system published yesterday. Although healthy schools may only receive a visit once every six years, others will be seen by inspectors every term until they show an improvement.

In addition to the 2 per cent of schools labelled "failing" under the current system, inspectors will be asked to identify those with serious weaknesses so that they can be targeted for action. These are expected to make up another 8 per cent of the country's 24,000 schools.

In future the inspectors will concentrate on the quality of English, maths and science in primary schools and on those subjects plus another four, yet to be finalised, in secondary schools.

The aim of the changes is to bring more flexibility to the inspection process, which currently works on a four-year cycle, and to take pressure off the inspection body, Ofsted, which is struggling to keep up with the cycle of primary inspections, due to be completed by 1998.

Yesterday the Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, announced a consultation on

the plans, which would come into effect for secondary schools next year and for primary schools the following year.

Schools which fail inspections are already subjected to special measures which include frequent visits by inspectors and the preparation of an action plan which must be approved by the Secretary of State for Education. If a school continues to fail, an education association can be sent in to take over and either improve standards or close the school.

In future, a larger number of schools with weaknesses will be subject to extra scrutiny. These weaknesses could include: low standards of teaching in four or more subjects or in more than a quarter of lessons; poor pupil behaviour; ineffective management; poor value for money; low attendance; or a high number of exclusions.

Schools which are not subjected to extra visits after their initial inspection may receive them later if their exam and test results or attendance levels fall, if exclusions rise or even if the head teacher changes.

Ofsted has yet to decide how to choose the four subjects which will be inspected in secondary schools in addition to maths, English and science, though one option is to allow schools to have a say in the choice. The subjects will prob-

ably vary from one school to another, and could be based on exam results or earlier inspection findings.

Commenting on the plans to name more weak schools, Mr Woodhead said the aim was to help rather than to vilify. "Whatever the impact on the staff or the community, we must find out what is going on," he said.

Labour's education spokesman, David Blunkett, condemned the changes. "This is a major admission of failure by ministers and Ofsted," he said. "The fact is that Ofsted missed its target for primary schools by a quarter in 1994-95 and has not recovered since. That is the main reason for this change."



Sitting pretty: Wilfred and Jeanette Cass with the sculptural seat 'Sitting on History' which was bought for Sculpture at Goodwood, their rolling display of contemporary works set in 20 acres in West Sussex, with £15,000 awarded to them by the 1996 National Arts Collections Fund. Photograph: Jane Baker

'Failed' teaching college faces uncertain future

FRAN ABRAMS

Lancaster University is considering the future of its teacher-training college after it became the first to fail an inspection of its primary school courses.

Ofsted, the national inspection body, found that some students at Charlotte Mason College in Cumbria lacked the levels of literacy and numeracy needed to teach maths and English. In particular they were weak in spelling, grammar and phonics, all of which are now considered central to the teaching of reading.

The college, which is part of the university but which is based in Ambleside, could be merged with the University College of Saint Martin in Lancaster, whose courses are accredited by the university.

The report is bound to have come as a significant blow to the university. The only other teacher-training course to fail was the secondary provision at the South Bank University in London, a former polytechnic. That course was closed shortly afterwards.

The Ofsted inspectors found courses at Charlotte Mason deficient in every area they reviewed. While a few students had a good grasp of the English national curriculum, too many had "limited and superficial" knowledge. In maths, some students were unable to teach effectively because of gaps in their own knowledge.

A significant number of students were unable to plan a

sequence of lessons properly, the inspectors said, and in some cases the work set was poorly matched to the ability and interests of their pupils. The quality of children's learning was poor as a result.

A team of five inspectors visited the college for four days in June last year, with a repeat visit in November. They observed teaching practice and training sessions at the university for the 830 students, 780 of whom were on a four-year undergraduate course and the rest on a one-year postgraduate scheme.

Yesterday the university admitted that it needed either to make a substantial investment in the college or to merge it, and said that a decision would be made at the end of May. However, the majority of students had been found to be able to teach effectively and some changes had already been put in place to address the shortcomings of the courses, it said.

John Halstead, principal of the college, said the conclusions had been based on the weaknesses of a minority of students. Other aspects of work in the department had previously received good reports, he added, expressing disappointment that Ofsted had chosen to base its findings on a small proportion of students.

"We have had massive support from ... the schools which employ our output. Getting on towards 100 schools have written in to say that their experience doesn't fit with that of the Ofsted inspectors," he said.

Half of under-30s 'have tried drugs'

Almost half of under-30s have dabbled with drugs with young whites overtaking Afro-Caribbeans of the same age as the biggest drug users, a report revealed yesterday.

The British Crime Survey found that while many 16 to 29-year-olds have taken drugs at some point, most claim they have taken them merely on a one-off basis or only occasionally. One in four have taken drugs in the past 12 months while one in seven admit to being regular users.

Cannabis is the most commonly used drug - and is twice as popular among younger people than other drugs.

The 1994 study, based on interviews with 10,000 people aged 16-59, gives a fascinating insight into drug use in Britain.

Not surprisingly drug use declines with age. Teenagers aged between 16 and 19 were most likely to be users, with one in five claiming to have taken drugs in the past month against 46 per cent ever.

A breakdown of under 30s who took stimulants at some point found 14 per cent had tried amphetamines or speed, 13 per cent poppers, 10 per cent magic mushrooms, 9 per cent LSD and 6 per cent ecstasy.

Just 3 per cent of under 30s had tried cocaine and less than 1 per cent had ever experimented with harder drugs like heroin, crack or methadone.

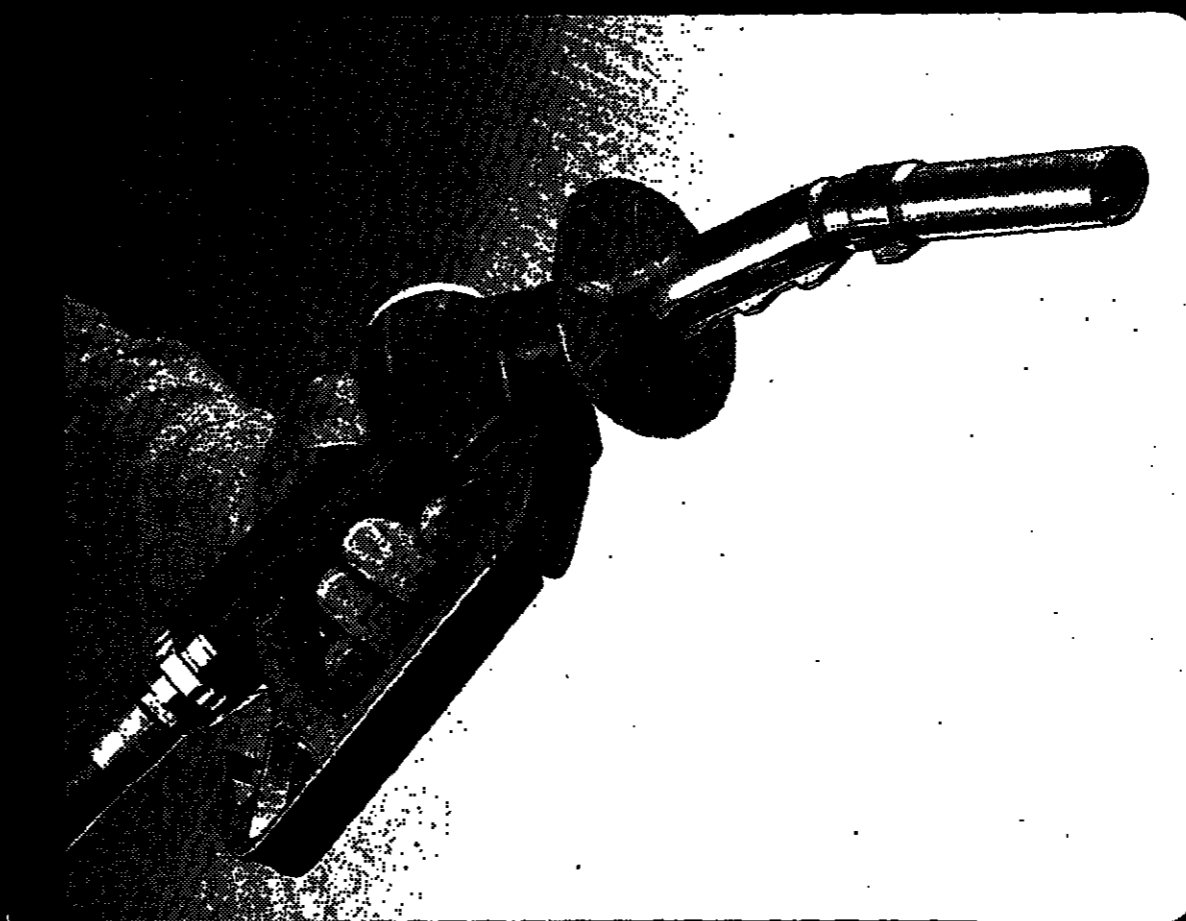
People living in London, other inner-cities or areas with large numbers of young people were more likely to have had contact with drugs.

Other strong indicators included people who were heavy drinkers, single, were away from home a lot, out of work, or lived in a poorer household, the survey found.

Afro-Caribbeans were more likely to use cannabis and crack than whites, who favoured speed, it said.

The findings will be used as background information by drug action teams as part of the Government's drugs strategy.

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LOCAL ELECTIONS

Swing augurs a 138-seat Labour majority

The implications of Thursday's vote for the next general election are deeply gloomy for the Conservatives, with only the faintest of silver linings.

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, admitted at yesterday's victory news conference: "I'm useless at statistics." But he was right to insist that the important comparison is between this week's local elections and those in May 1991, 11 months before the last general election.

Although the elections in 1991 were in a different set of local councils, the BBC's number crunchers estimate how they translate into parties' shares of the national vote. In 1991, Labour were just 1 percentage point ahead of the Tories. On Thursday, Labour were 16 points ahead.

A simple projection forwards, assuming the same relationship between local and national voting, suggests that Mr

Analysis

Blair is heading for a 7.5-point lead at the general election, which must be held within the next 12 months. That, as the BBC's Peter Snow might say, would mean a Labour majority of 138 seats – nearly as large as Margaret Thatcher's 144-seat majority in 1983.

Little wonder the bookmakers yesterday shortened the odds on a Labour victory.

But, of course, there are – as Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party chairman, also rightly insisted yesterday – reasons for thinking that Mr Blair will not have such an easy ride to Downing Street.

The first, and perhaps most important, was the low turnout, suggesting that voters are not yet so enthused by new Labour that they feel they actually have to

take a detour on the way to work to sign up for it.

Turnout figures for local elections are notoriously difficult to compare year on year, but the BBC computer processing the early results on Thursday night showed many turnout figures dropping by about two percentage points.

This means turnout was, on average, sinking down towards 30 per cent, compared with 46 per cent in 1991 (and 78 per cent in the last general election).

Against this background, Mr Blair's claim that the local elections showed "people are demonstrating a far greater enthusiasm for today's Labour Party" rings a little hollow.

The other main reason for scepticism about Labour's performance is that local elections, like by-elections and opinion polls, have increasingly been used to express a protest against the Government – a

protest that is probably becoming increasingly disconnected from people's real views when it comes to choosing a Government.

On the other hand, there are grounds for suggesting that Thursday's results might even have understated Labour's strength. Labour has for years underperformed its national opinion poll ratings in local elections, while the Liberal Democrats have overperformed, and the Tories follow their poll ratings quite closely.

It is likely that, as at the last general election, many people who have become used to voting Liberal Democrat for council elections – either as a tactical vote against the Tories or as a protest against a local Labour council – will switch to Labour for parliamentary elections.

But the triumph for the Liberal Democrats was that they resisted the surge of new Labour

onto the centre ground. They took control of six more councils and pushed the Conservatives further into third place.

Even more encouragingly for them, on the BBC's estimate, their share of the vote was up – and if some of their targets such as Mole Valley and Stratford-upon-Avon failed to fall, they took Hastings in a fierce fight with Labour.

They failed to advance in Oldham, where Labour took five seats from the Conservatives to gain overall control, and along with the Conservatives took seats in Rochdale as Labour lost the council decisively from no overall control – a change that could threaten the Liberal Democrat MP, Liz Lynne.

The party's results aggregated across other constituencies, however, showed them taking over 50 per cent of the vote in the new Oldham East and Saddleworth seat, while Norman

Lamont's departure from Kingston to the apparently safer haven of Harrogate and Knaresborough will prove a nasty shock if the general election result mirrors the council vote. The Liberal Democrats took 49.5 per cent, against just over 32 per cent for the Tories.

The party's results in the inner cities were mixed – despite Paddy Ashdown's claim that "where the Conservatives need to be beaten we are proving we can beat them, and where Labour governs badly we can beat them too." The Liberal Democrats took six seats in Sheffield, three each off Labour and the Conservatives, and became the official opposition ahead of the Conservatives in Birmingham as the Tories lost fifteen seats, 12 to Labour and 3 to the Liberal Democrats.

John Rentoul and Nicholas Timmins

Gains and losses on Thursday							
	Councillors	Overall total in Great Britain					
Con	-567	4,415					
Lab	+459	11,326					
LD	+147	5,182					
Others	-38	2,958					
	Councils						
Con	-1	12					
Lab	+11	218					
LD	+6	98					
No overall control	-17	140					
Other:	+1	31					
Source: BBC Political Research Unit							
Share of the vote							
	1991	92 gn	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Con	35%	42%	45%	31%	27%	25%	27%
Lab	36%	35%	30%	41%	42%	46%	43%
LD	21%	18%	19%	24%	27%	24%	26%
National equivalent estimated by BBC							

From no change in Barnsley to a Labour win in Wyre Forest, the results in full

Metropolitan councils

BARNSELY
Lab, 63; Ind, 2; C, 1.
Lab, No change

BIRMINGHAM
Lab, 87; LD, 17; C, 13.
Lab, No change

BOLTON
Lab, 48; C, 6; LD, 6.
Lab, No change

BRADFORD
Lab, 71; C, 13; LD, 6.
Lab, No change

BURY
Lab, 41; C, 4; LD, 3.
Lab, No change

CALDERDALE
Lab, 37; C, 8; LD, 8; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

COVENTRY
Lab, 49; C, 4; Vac, 1.
Lab, No change

DONCASTER
Lab, 59; C, 2; LD, 2.
Lab, No change

DUDLEY
Lab, 60; C, 8; LD, 4.
Lab, No change

GATESHEAD
Lab, 50; LD, 13; C, 1; Lab, 1; Others, 1.
Lab, No change

KIRKLEES
Lab, 45; LD, 18; C, 6; Ind, 1; Vac, 1.
Lab, No change

KNOWSLEY
Lab, 65; LD, 1.
Lab, No change

LEEDS
Lab, 82; LD, 9; C, 8.
Lab, No change

LIVERPOOL
Lab, 51; LD, 41; Lab, 2; C, 1; Ind, 1; Others, 3.
Lab, No change

MANCHESTER
Lab, 84; LD, 15.
Lab, No change

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE
Lab, 65; LD, 13.
Lab, No change

OLDHAM
Lab, 35; LD, 24; Ind, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

ROCHDALE
Lab, 36; LD, 18; C, 6.
Lab, gain from NOC

ROTHERHAM
Lab, 65; C, 1.
Lab, No change

SALFORD
Lab, 57; LD, 3.
Lab, No change

SANDWELL
Lab, 60; LD, 9; C, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

SEFTON
Lab, 52; LD, 24; C, 13.
NOC No change

SHEFFIELD
Lab, 55; LD, 31; C, 1.
Lab, No change

SOLIHULL
C, 16; Lab, 16; LD, 12; R, 4; Ind, 1; Vac, 1; Others, 1.
NOC No change

ST HELENS
Lab, 44; LD, 9; C, 1.
Lab, No change

STOKPORT
LD, 31; Lab, 27; C, 2; R, 2; Ind, 1.
NOC No change

SUNDERLAND
Lab, 68; C, 4; LD, 2; Others, 1.
Lab, No change

TAMESIDE
Lab, 54; Ind, 2; LD, 1.
Lab, No change

TRAFFORD
Lab, 35; C, 23; LD, 5.
Lab, gain from NOC

NORTH TYNSIDE
Lab, 45; C, 8; LD, 6; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

SOUTH TYNSIDE
Lab, 52; LD, 6; Ind, 1; Others, 1.
Lab, No change

WAKEFIELD
Lab, 61; C, 2.
Lab, No change

WALSALL
Lab, 25; C, 12; LD, 5; Ind, 3; Others, 15.
NOC No change

WIGAN
Lab, 69; LD, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

WIRRAL
Lab, 41; C, 16; LD, 9.
Lab, No change

WOLVERHAMPTON
Lab, 46; C, 12; LD, 2.
Lab, No change

Non-metropolitan councils

ADUR
Lab, 29; Lab, 6; C, 2; R, 2.
LD, No change

AMBER VALLEY
Lab, 39; C, 2; Ind, 2.
Lab, No change

BARROW-IN-FURNESS
Lab, 29; C, 4; Others, 5.
Lab, No change

BASILDON
Lab, 24; LD, 17; C, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

BASINGSTOKE & DEANE
C, 23; LD, 17; Lab, 14; Ind, 3.
NOC No change

BASSETLAW
Lab, 34; C, 6; LD, 3; Ind, 2; Others, 5.
Lab, No change

BEDFORD
Lab, 22; LD, 16; C, 10; Ind, 5.
NOC No change

SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE
Lab, 24; LD, 15; C, 11; Ind, 3.
NOC No change

BLACKBURN
Lab, 45; C, 12; LD, 3.
Lab, No change

BRENTWOOD
LD, 25; C, 12; Lab, 2.
LD, No change

BROADLAND
Lab, 20; C, 12; LD, 12; Ind, 5.
NOC No change

BROXBORNE
C, 24; Lab, 14; LD, 4.
C, No change

BURNLEY
Lab, 38; LD, 8; C, 1; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

CAMBRIDGE
Lab, 23; LD, 18; C, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Ind, 21; C, 13; LD, 11; Lab, 10.
NOC No change

CANNOCK CHASE
Lab, 40; LD, 2.
Lab, No change

CARLISLE
Lab, 33; C, 14; LD, 3; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

CHELLENHAM
LD, 24; C, 3; Lab, 1; Others, 3.
LD, No change

CHERWELL
Lab, 28; C, 16; LD, 8.
Lab, gain from NOC

CHESTER
Lab, 27; LD, 18; C, 14; Ind, 1.
NOC No change

CHORLEY
Lab, 35; LD, 7; C, 5; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

COLCHESTER
LD, 53; Lab, 15; C, 11; R, 1.
LD, No change

CONGLETON
LD, 28; Lab, 11; C, 5; Ind, 1.
LD, No change

CRAYEN
LD, 18; C, 6; Lab, 6; Ind, 4.
LD, No change

CRAWLEY
Lab, 28; C, 2; LD, 2.
Lab, No change

CREWE & NANTWICH
Lab, 38; C, 15; LD, 3; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

DAVENTRY
Lab, 15; C, 15; Ind, 3; LD, 2.
NOC No change

EASTBOURNE
LD, 22; C, 8.
LD, No change

EASTLEIGH
LD, 31; C, 7; Lab, 6.
LD, No change

ELLESMERE PORT & NESTON
Lab, 36; C, 5.
Lab, No change

ELMBRIDGE
Lab, 40; LD, 2.
Lab, No change



Tomorrow's voters: A visibly unruffled John Major meets a party of schoolchildren in Downing Street yesterday

Photograph: Edward Sykes

Changing face of local politics

Councils changing hands - all from no overall control

Eleven Labour gains:

Trafford, Hertsmere, Rochdale, Oldham, Basildon, Peterborough, Wyre Forest, Cherwell, Cambridge, North Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes

Seven Liberal Democrat gains:

Hastings, Tunbridge Wells, West Lindsey, Woking, Wokingham, North Somerset, Poole.

Runnymede slipped from Conservative overall control but will be run by Tories on mayor's casting vote.

C, 22; R, 20; LD, 9; Lab, 8; Ind, 1.
NOC No change

EPPING FOREST
Lab, 17; LD, 16; C, 13; R, 9; Ind, 3; Soc Dem, 1.
NOC No change

EXETER
Lab, 24; LD, 7; Lab, 3; C, 2.
Lab, No change

FAKERMAR
LD, 21; C, 10; Lab, 8; Others, 3.
NOC No change

GILLINGHAM
LD, 30; Lab, 10; C, 2.
LD, No change

GLOUCESTER
Lab, 25; LD, 8; C, 2.
Lab, No change

GOSPORT
LD, 17; Lab, 7; C, 4; Ind, 2.
LD, No change

GREAT YARMOUTH
Lab, 38; C, 9; LD, 1.
Lab, No change

HALTO
LD, 19; LD, 7; Lab, 6; C, 3; Green, 1.
Ind, No change

HARLOW
Lab, 39; LD, 3.
Lab, No change

HARROGATE
LD, 44; C, 10; Lab, 4; Ind, 1.
LD, No change

HART
LD, 15; C, 12; Ind, 8.
NOC No change

HASTINGS
LD, 17; Lab, 15.
LD, gain from NOC

HAVANT
LD, 20; Lab, 11; C, 8; Ind, 3.
NOC No change

HEREFORD
LD, 23; Lab, 4.
LD, No change

SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE
Ind, 25; LD, 13; Vac, 1.
Ind, No change

Key

C Conservative
Lab Labour
LD Liberal Democrat
Green Green Party
BNP British National Party
Ind Independent
R Ratepayers or Residents
LD Social Democrat
Others Other

NORTH HEREFORDSHIRE

Lab, 27; C, 16; LD, 6; Ind, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

HERKIMER

Lab, 22; C, 8; LD, 8; Ind, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

HUNTINGDONSHIRE

C, 33; LD, 13; Lab, 5; Ind, 2.
C, No change

RYNDBURN

Lab, 44; C, 3.
Lab, No change

JPSWICH

Lab, 41; C, 6; LD, 1.
Lab, No change

SOUTH LAKELAND

LD, 24; Ind, 12; C, 10; Lab, 6.
NOC No change

WEST LANCAHIRE

Lab, 35; C, 20.
Lab, No change

LEOMINSTER

Ind, 19; LD, 7; Lab, 6; C, 3; Green, 1.
Ind, No change

LINCINN

Lab, 33.
Lab, No change

WEST LINDESEY

LD, 19; Ind, 10; Lab, 3; C, 2; Others, 3.
LD, gain from NOC

MACCLESFIELD

C, 33; Lab, 12; LD, 11; R, 3; Vac, 1.
C, No change

MAIDSTONE

LD, 21; Lab, 18; C, 11; Ind, 5.
NOC No change

MOLE VALLEY

LD, 19; C, 11; Ind, 9; Lab, 2.
NOC No change

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

Lab, 42; LD, 10; C, 4.
Lab, No change

NORWICH

Lab, 37; LD, 11.
Lab, No change

Lab, No change

NUNEATON & BEDWORTH

Lab, 42; C, 3.
Lab, No change

OXFORD

Lab, 39; LD, 9; Green, 3.
Lab, No change

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

Ind, 15; LD, 14; Lab, 11; C, 9.
NOC No change

PINDLE

LD, 29; Lab, 19; C, 3.
LD, No change

PENWITH

LD, 11; Lab, 9; Ind, 8; C, 4; Others, 2.
NOC No change

PETERBOROUGH

Lab, 29; C, 13; Lab, 3; LD, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, gain from NOC

PRESTON

Lab, 32; C, 13; LD, 12.
Lab, No change

PURBECK

LD, 11; Ind, 5; C, 3; Lab, 3.
NOC No change

READING

Lab, 35; LD, 8; C, 4.
Lab, No change

REDDITCH

Lab, 25; C, 3; LD, 1.
Lab, No change

REIGATE & BANSTEAD

C, 15; LD, 14; Lab, 14; R, 4; Ind, 2.
NOC No change

ROCHFORD

LD, 23; Lab, 11; R, 3; C, 2; Ind, 1.
LD, No change

ROSENDALE

Lab, 31; C, 5.
Lab, No change

RUGBY

Lab, 22; C, 11; R, 4; LD, 5; Ind, 2; Others, 2.
NOC No change

RUNNYMEDE

Lab, 41; LD, 9; C, 3; Ind, 1.
Lab, control new council

Unitary councils

BOURNEMOUTH

LD, 28; C, 14; Lab, 6; Ind, 4.
No overall control

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Lab, 54; C, 23; Green, 1.
Lab, control new council

DARLINGTON

Lab, 36; C, 13; LD, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, control new council

DERBY

Lab, 39; C, 3; LD, 2.
Lab, control new council

HARTLEPOOL

Lab, 39; LD, 5; C, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, No change

LEICESTER

Lab, 41; LD, 8; C, 7.
Lab, control new council

LUTON

Lab, 36; LD, 9; C, 3.
Lab, control new council

MILTON KEYNES

Lab, 38; LD, 18; C, 2; Ind, 1.
Lab, control new council

POOLE

Lab, 25; C, 13; Lab, 3.
LD, control new council

PORTSMOUTH

Lab, 21; LD, 12; C, 6.
Lab, control new council

RUTLAND

Ind, 11; LD, 5; C, 2; Lab, 2.
Ind, control new council

SOUTHAMPTON

Lab, 24; LD, 13; C, 3.
Lab, control new council

STOKE-ON-TRENT

Lab, no.
Lab, control new council

THAMESIDOWN

Lab, 41; LD, 9; C, 3; Ind, 1.
Lab, control new council

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Tories fail to find southern comfort

NICHOLAS TIMMINS
Public Policy Editor

Bournemouth, Poole, Brighton and Hove, three South coast towns which the Conservatives promoted as their best hope for signs of a Tory revival, failed to deliver on Thursday.

With the elections for new shadow unitary authorities the seats were being contested on last year's results - the Conservatives' worst ever in local government - rather than the high of 1992 on which most of Thursday's poll was fought.

But in Bournemouth, rather than advancing to take control again of a town that had been true blue for a century up to 1991, the Conservatives slipped back, taking a net loss of two.

In Poole, they merely stood still, sticking on 13 seats as the Liberal Democrats gained five - three new seats plus one gain from Labour and one from an independent.

In Brighton and Hove, Geoffrey Theobald, the likely Conservative group leader, claimed a 2 per cent swing back to the Conservatives yesterday. But they still lost seven seats to Labour's nine gains. Steve Bassam, Labour's leader in Brighton, retorting that "54 seats out of 78" - Labour's position on the new authority - "is a landslide in anybody's terms".

In Bournemouth, June Griffiths, a defeated Conservative councillor, blamed the Government. "The things that lost us this were national policies, not local ones," she said. "There is general dissatisfaction with the way the Government is handling oh so many things."

Low interest rates were hitting the income of Bournemouth's army of pensioners, she said, while many were worried about long-term care. If the economy was improving, "people like us have not felt it yet".

SOUTH COAST

Bob Chapman, the Tory group leader, also blamed "general dissatisfaction" with the Government. "We worked very hard. We couldn't have done much more to pull the vote out, but it didn't want to come."

The town held its own disappointment for the Liberal Democrats who failed by one seat to turn their minority control into full control. A revived Labour vote produced a Conservative gain in one ward at the Liberal Democrat's expense.

In neighbouring Poole, however, talked up by Labour as a likely site for gains, there was no such Blair effect. Their four seats fell to three as the Liberal Democrats strengthened their control. "We expected to do much better," Tony Gardner, the Labour group leader who lost his own seat, admitted.

Ominously for the Tories he said tactical voting played a part. "The Liberal Democrats said very clearly that only they could keep the Tories out and that had some effect, there's no doubt about that."

The result leaves the Liberal Democrats poised to take the new parliamentary seat of Mid Dorset and North Devon, to be contested by Alan Leaman, the party's director of strategy. In the relevant wards the Liberal Democrats took 52 per cent of the vote, he said, yesterday.

Further along the coast, Conservative Central Office's hopes of a revival faded no better. Labour held Portsmouth and in Hastings the Tories suffered a wipe-out losing their last five seats as the Liberal Democrats took control. Tactical voting in the general election would threaten the 6,634 majority of the Conservative MP Jacqui Lait over the Liberal Democrats in Hastings and Rye.

A lonely life now Essex has rejected old allies

WILL BENNETT

Malcolm Buckley yesterday contemplated a solitary existence in Basildon council chamber with the sort of determined optimism which Conservative activists have to adopt in these desperate times.

"I suppose I will feel a bit lonely," said Mr Buckley. "But there are a great number of former councillors and party workers who will be working with me to achieve some of our Conservative ideals and put our case forward."

On Thursday Mr Buckley was the only Conservative councillor to survive in Basildon when he fought off the Liberal Democrat challenge in his Wickford South ward by 99 votes. Thirteen of his party colleagues were defeated and Labour took control of the council.

The landslide qualified him for endangered species status in the Essex town which was the symbol of John Major's General Election victory in 1992. The Tory victory there provided the first clear signal that Labour had lost for the fourth time running. It demonstrated that Essex

Man, the epitome of the populist working-class voter enlisted to the Tory cause by Baroness Thatcher, was still backing the Government. But Mr Major can no longer rely on this crucial sector of the electorate.

Mr Buckley, 45, an estate agent, tried to sound upbeat yesterday when he pointed out that last year Basildon Conservatives lost every ward, including his own which went to the Liberal Democrats by four votes. But he admitted that voters had told him that all the political parties, including the Conservatives, lacked any kind of broad vision.

He believes that to start winning back seats in Basildon the Conservatives have to stop squabbling, tell voters that there is more that unites them under the Tory banner than divides them and hammer home the message that Britain is doing better economically than other European countries.

In terms of public relations the Conservative Party as an organisation has an appalling record," he said. "The Labour Party has rung rings around us for a couple of years and I certainly think that Brian Marwhinney, the party chairman, has got to take that in hand."

Like many grass roots Conservatives he has watched with dismay as the party has fought publicly over European policy. "We should concentrate on areas of European policy where there is agreement and on the positive aspects, resolve our differences in private and present a publicly united front," he said.

"The other thing we have to do is to bring to the electorate's attention just how how unreliable the opposition are. If Labour came to power I don't think that we will see the Tony Blair version of the Labour Party, we will see the John Prescott and Robin Cook version."

Conservatives in Basildon still regard Lady Thatcher as the leader they should never have lost but have reluctantly accepted Mr Major as her successor. They believe that he now has to demonstrate her political gut instincts when faced with a crisis.

"I don't think we have any choice about John Major leading us into the next general election," Mr Buckley said. "I expect him to get back on his soap box and deliver the goods by sticking to good, basic Conservative beliefs."

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Stumped by mayor in cricket heartland

JAMES CUSICK

When the Magna Carta, the great charter of liberties, was signed in Runnymede in 1215, there was so much worry over "the abuses of local government" that a special clause was demanded by the barons. Yesterday, 781 years on in Runnymede, they were still worrying about local government.

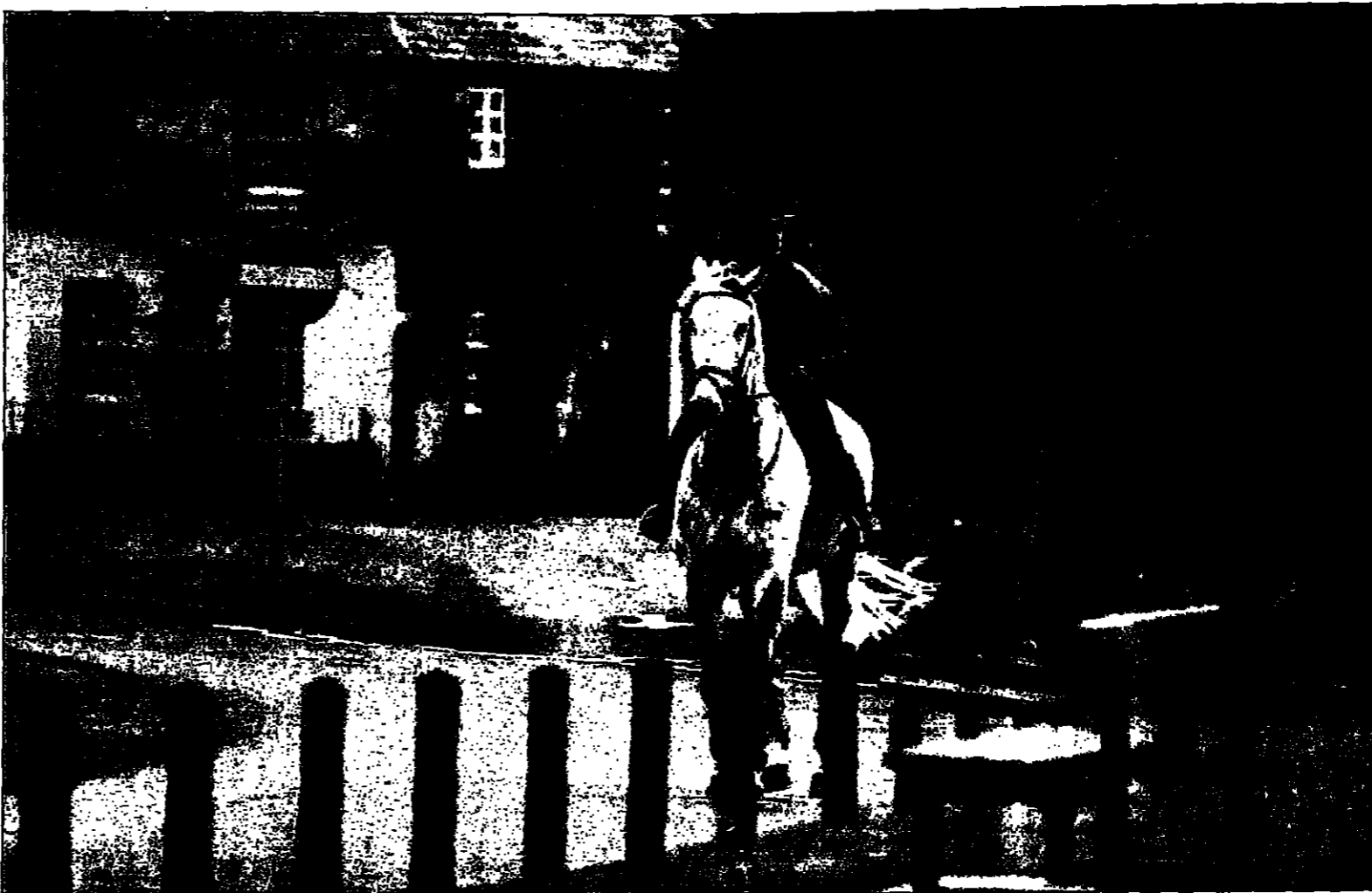
True-blue Surrey, redolent of gins and tonics, fine golf clubs, pop stars' palaces, and the cricket and warm beer of village greens so beloved by the Prime Minister, had almost lowered the Tory flag of control.

Only the casting vote of the Tory mayor of Runnymede will now ensure the party's control. In two key wards of the 13 contested on Thursday, Labour lost by a total of only 24 votes.

"It was sickening for us really," said Rodney Pate, leader of the Labour group in Runnymede. In this part of world the Labour Party don't normally choose council candidates; they send out a search party. The Tories' loss of two wards, with Labour gaining two, means the new council is now made up of 21 Tories, 14 Labour, six independents and one Liberal Democrat. A new mayor will be elected on 14 May.

If the Conservative's national party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, is still struggling to see the light at the end of a tunnel today, he could do no better than telephone Howard Langley, Runnymede's council leader. Mr Langley spent most of yesterday with his calculator. The result of his digital arithmetic was, he insisted, good news.

Loss of control, loss of two seats, end of an era? Mr Langley will have none of it. Without mentioning losses he said: "Two years ago we won seven seats, last year we won nine seats. Anyone who is writing off the Conservatives is a fool."



Tory stronghold still: Englefield Green, where villagers are preparing for cricket and warm beer this summer as usual

Photograph: Philip Meech

There will be warm beer and cricket at Englefield Green where the grass is being prepared for the village cricket season and even if Tories all over the country are drowning in tears, Mr Langley is set to break out the champagne. "The Conservatives in Runnymede did brilliantly," he said in his best Dunkirk voice. "Our overall vote went up by 3,000 to 11,000; our overall percentage of the vote went up from 74 to 76 per cent. If this is melted down, then gee whizz, who is kidding who?"

And there was a message for Mr Mawhinney: Mr Langley insisted the Tories' campaign was positive. "We fought on what the reasons were to vote for us."

Labour, as almost-but-not-quite losers sometimes do, blamed anything. Mr Pate said Labour had too few troops on the ground, and claimed the

Tories fought a "dirty" leafletting campaign. And in Virginia Water the Labour vote actually tripled from around 30 votes to just over 100. "Is that all we got?" asked Mr Pate. "We were hoping for more, but I suppose when the constituency is divided into the wealthy and the very wealthy, you can't call that a natural Labour seat, can you?"

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news

Jail for killer who called 1471 to trace victim

An unemployed man who stabbed his love rival to death with an eight-inch carving knife after finding out his identity by dialling British Telecom's 1471 call-back service was yesterday cleared of murder by a jury.

But Colin Critchlow, 23, of Wednesfield, West Midlands, was jailed for five-and-a-half years for the manslaughter of 18-year-old soldier Andrew Green, of Willenhall, West Midlands.

The jury at Northampton Crown Court was told that Critchlow, who had denied murder, stabbed Mr Green in the back four times then kicked him in the head with stockpiled safety boots as he lay dying.

The jury found Critchlow guilty of manslaughter on the grounds that he was provoked into the attack by his live-in girlfriend Joanne Rudge, 19, also of Wednesfield.

They had been told that she flaunted her affections for Mr Green in front of him. Critchlow was also sentenced to a year in jail, to be served consecutively, after admitting stealing nearly £14,000 from the safe of an hotel in Wolverhampton where he previously worked as a porter.

He asked the court to pass on his regret and sorrow what he had done to the Green family. Outside court after the hearing members of Mr Green's family were in tears, and described the verdict as a disgrace.

"He has got away with murder. It is a disgrace," said Mr Green's grandmother, Elizabeth Green.

Mr Green's parents and other members of his family were often in tears as they sat through the five-day trial.

The jury had been told how Critchlow became suspicious that Ms Rudge, with whom he has a one-year-old daughter,

was seeing someone else. He dialled 1471 after finding a number he did not recognise on their telephone - and got the number of Mr Green's parents home.

He then chased Mr Green in a car after spotting him kissing and holding hands with Ms Rudge in Wednesfield last August.

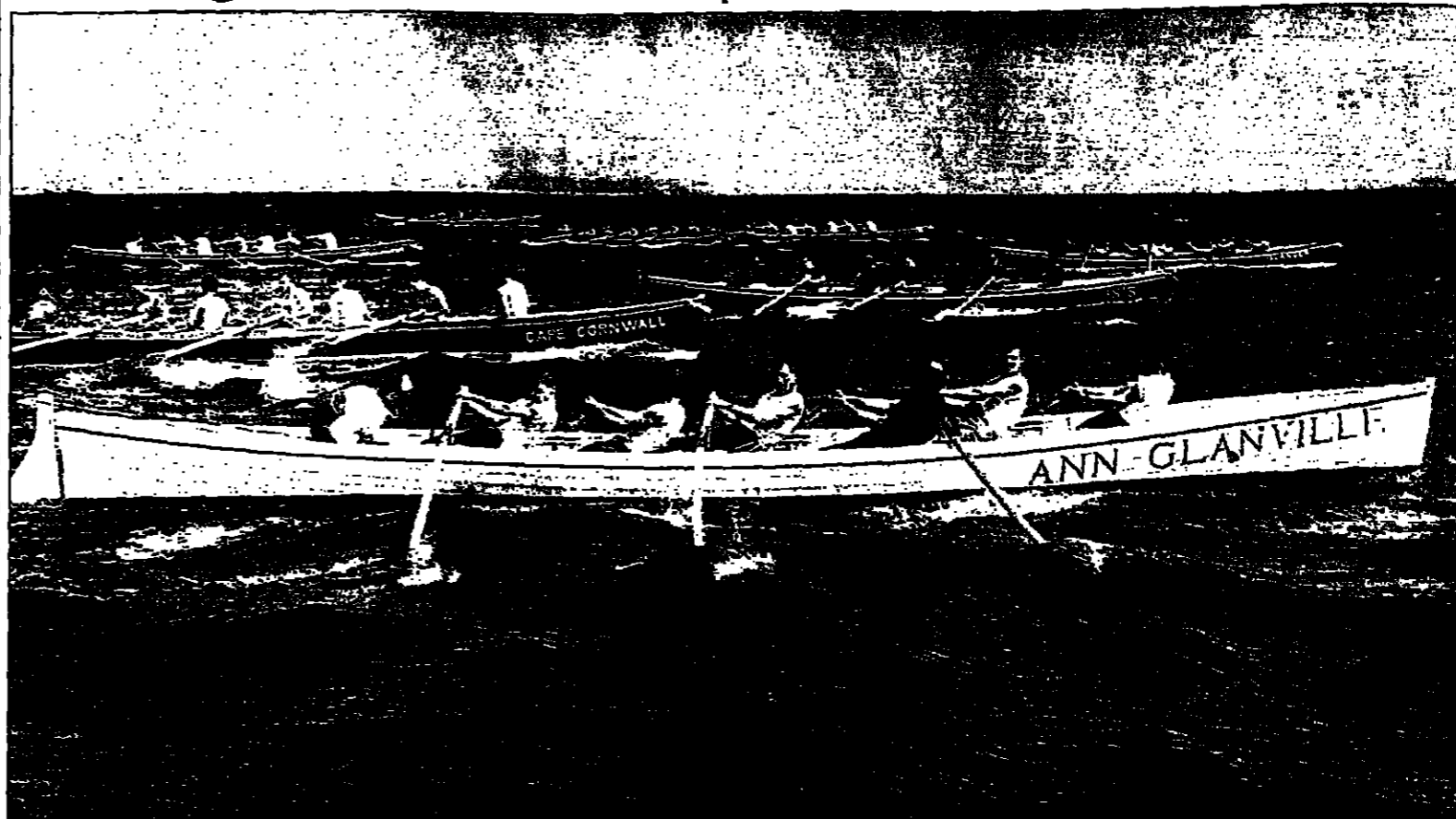
Mr Green stumbled and fell over as he tried to get away. Critchlow leapt out of the car and stabbed him four times in the back as he lay face down on the floor.

He then kicked Mr Green in the head, shouting: "Get up and fight you bastard."

Critchlow claimed in his evidence that he had not intended to kill Mr Green and said he had no memory of stabbing him with the knife.

Mr Green, a private in the Royal Artillery, had only returned home on leave the night before his death.

Rowing out to win after a quiet winter with the lettuces



The Ann Glanville sets out to sea in one of the toughest and fastest-growing sports in the world - pilot-gig racing. Manned by a crew of "hefty lads", the gig, named after a legendary 6ft Cornish

oarswoman, will defend its title in the world championships to be held around the Scilly Isles this weekend.

Martin Langdon, a graphic artist and crew member - along with a coalman,

two builder's labourers and a firefighter - has high hopes of winning again this year, with crew and boat well-prepared. "We stripped the gig down ... and let it dry out inside the [garden] lettuce

cloche," he said, making her "very, very tight" for the race, which goes ahead even in the roughest seas. "One minute your car can be 10 feet in the air, the next you are 10 feet under water," he said.

Fans united in stand over seats of yearning

KATE WATSON-SMYTH

Manchester United expect to be crowned champions of football's Premier League at Middlesbrough tomorrow, but a group of their most loyal supporters will be reluctant to join the celebrations.

The club, who have annoyed fans with frequent changes of kit and been criticised for selling their own brand whisky, now face protests stemming from the £28 million redevelopment of their Old Trafford ground.

Last season, 1,500 season ticket holders were temporarily moved while the north stand was rebuilt. But United have told the supporters that they will not be able to return to their old seats because the area has been set aside for executive members and corporate entertainment.

Two disgruntled regulars, Eric and Mary Brownhill, have supported the club for the last 50 years and never miss a home match. Since 1966, they have enjoyed "the best seats in the ground" - in the centre of the North Stand. Now, they may cancel their season tickets.

Mrs Brownhill, aged 75, from Stretford, said: "We have been totally loyal for 50 years and now they have taken our seats away so that they can give them to people with more money. There is an enormous feeling of betrayal among fans. We never deserted them, even when they were in the second division. This is how they treat us."

United season tickets are highly prized and supporters

must show strong evidence of their loyalty to the club before they can buy one. The Brownhills spend £308 out of their pension every year, but the new cost in the executive stand is £1,200.

"We have been told that we can keep our temporary seats which are right up in a corner where we can't see the goal," said Mrs Brownhill. "We can return to north stand, but only on one of the new tiers which are very high up. We cannot manage that many steps."

"We may just call it a day and cancel our tickets altogether. It will be such a shame, but there is no point spending money for seats that are no good."

Susan Halpern, who has sat behind the Brownhills with her husband Jeffrey for 28 years, accused the club of not telling supporters of its plans until the last minute. "We were led to believe up until last week that we would have our old seats back and now we will have to take grossly inferior seats because it is too late to do anything about it. The fans have been treated disgracefully."

Ken Ramsden, United's assistant secretary, said it had been decided that an executive area was the best way of recouping the huge ground costs. "We've apologised, but it was very expensive to rebuild the stand and we had to generate the money from somewhere," he said. "We are a commercial organisation and need to generate an income to continue our current level of success."

Championship preview, sport

Oyston 'victim' dabbled in drugs

A woman who claims she was raped by millionaire Owen Oyston in a three-in-a-bed sex session told a court yesterday that she had dabbled in drugs since the age of 13.

The woman, now aged 20, claims that when she was 16 she was driven to 62-year-old Mr Oyston's country mansion, where she watched him have sex with another girl before being ordered to take her clothes off and join them.

Cross-examined by Anthony Scrivenor QC, defending at Liverpool Crown Court, the woman admitted she had smoked cannabis and taken ecstasy and amphetamines occasionally since she was 13.

She said she smoked cannabis as recently as last year. "I was smoking cannabis to forget," she said. "It made me forget things. I didn't want to face up to things."

But she told Mr Scrivenor: "It doesn't give him the right to do what he did though, does it?" Mr Scrivenor replied: "Not at all, not at all."

The woman also claims Mr Oyston, chairman of Blackpool football club, forced her to perform oral sex in the back of a car. Mr Oyston, of Cloughton Hall, near Lancaster, pleads not guilty to raping and indecently assaulting the woman, and denies raping another woman.

The first woman in the case,

who has already given evidence, has told the jury she was driven to Mr Oyston's house late at night and raped on the four-poster bed.

Asked by Mr Scrivenor whether she protested when Mr Oyston allegedly forced her to have oral sex, the woman asked: "What could I do?"

Mr Scrivenor said: "You could have said no." "I put my head up and he pulled it back down," the woman said.

She refuted Mr Scrivenor's suggestion that the incident never took place. Mr Scrivenor said she could have asked Lisa French, who was sitting in the front seat of the car, for help. The woman said: "Lisa ... she was going out with him."

She denied she had been interested in looking around Mr Oyston's house.

Mr Scrivenor suggested that she was, and that she went upstairs to look at the bedroom. Lisa French had gone to the bathroom and when she came out they had all left.

The woman said: "You can suggest what you like but I am not lying. I know what happened."

She could not remember if she saw a doctor after the incident.

Asked why she had not complained to anyone, she said: "I was too ashamed."

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TESCO

Detectives link Tasmania killer to more murders

Geoff Spencer
of Associated Press

Hobart — Police said yesterday that they will re-investigate two unsolved murders and a disappearance in Tasmania to see if they are connected with the man accused of a massacre last weekend.

Martin Bryant, 28, is accused of shooting 35 sightseers and staff at the Port Arthur colonial prison complex last Sunday with high-powered assault weapons. He then barricaded himself inside a guest cottage with three hostages and set it alight. He is now in Royal Hobart Hospital under heavy police guard with extensive burns to his back.

Assistant Police Commissioner Luppoo Prins said yesterday that officials will determine if Bryant was linked to the murders of a tourist and a local man, and the disappearance of a German tourist.

Italian tourist Victoria Cafasso, 20, was stabbed to death on a beach at Beaumaris on Tasmania's east coast late last year. Leo Rogers was stabbed more than 60 times in his home in Hobart last year, and Nancy

Grundwaldt, 26, disappeared near Beaumaris in 1993.

Meanwhile, the first victim of this week's Port Arthur massacre was laid to rest. More than 600 mourners paid their respects to Royce Thompson, 59, a bus driver who died in the massacre at the historic ruins of Australia's most notorious colonial-era prison.

Mr Thompson was mowed down by his bus. He had driven a group of tourists on a regular day trip to Port Arthur. "He was a special fellow, one of nature's gentlemen," his boss, Bob Chung Gon, said before the funeral at St Clement's church in Kingston, near Hobart.

Yesterday's burial will be followed by many more as bodies, most of them of visitors from other states, are returned to relatives over the next few days following post mortem examinations. Of the 18 people wounded in the massacre, 10 are still in hospital, one in a serious condition. Most are expected to be released next week.

Lindsay Pyne, the hospital's chief executive, said more than 40 threats had been received since Bryant was brought there. Most callers are angry that

Bryant is receiving medical care under the same roof as some of the people he is suspected of wounding.

A trace was put on the hospital switchboard on Thursday after staff absenteeism increased dramatically following the threats. "There's been a few phone calls that have been tracked and handed over to the police," Pyne said yesterday.

Police have not released details of the threats, but the calls have frightened hospital staff already stressed from long hours of treating badly wounded people, Pyne said. A bomb scare was also telephoned to the hospital and 80 staff and 12 emergency patients were temporarily evacuated.



Still calling: Rosie Gries, 100 years old, celebrating with her great grand-daughter, Kristine

Photograph: AP

Avon lady rings up a century

Bismarck, North Dakota (AP) — Rosie Gries made her first Avon sale in 1938 — a 10-cent (6p) tube of hand cream. Now, at the age of 100, she is still ringing doorbells as the cosmetic company's oldest salesperson.

"I feel like I did when I was 16," Ms Gries said on her birthday on Thursday. "I don't feel my age. I can't believe it."

Some things have changed in the 58 years she has been selling for Avon — she hires a driver for her twice-monthly rounds, and she does not see or hear as well as she used to.

Nonetheless, Ms Gries has vowed to sell Avon for "as long as I can walk". She has about 25 customers in the sparsely populated area of North Dakota where she lives.

Ms Gries has gained fame for her long service — even making a television appearance on *The Tonight Show* in 1986. Avon paid tribute to its oldest salesperson by throwing a party for Ms Gries. "Tomorrow starts a new day and then I have to start over again," she said.

Chinese dissident flees to America

Renée Schoof
Associated Press

Peking — A leader of China's 1989 democracy movement has fled to the United States because police harassment made it impossible for him to find a job or a place to live.

Liu Gang left China with the help of international human rights groups and arrived in the



Liu Gang: Police prevented him from getting a job

US penniless but with political asylum, the New York-based group Human Rights in China reported yesterday.

In Washington, presidential spokesman Mike McCurry said Mr Liu entered the US under a Justice Department waiver that allows admittance for emergency or national interest cases.

Mr Liu served a six-year prison sentence for participation in the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protest, earning the nickname "Iron Man" for his refusal to bend to prison rules.

Robin Munro of Human Rights Watch Asia called Mr Liu "a very brave man and indomitable fighter for democracy" who was "badly tortured and beaten and ill-treated" in prison.

China has almost no dissident community left, Mr Munro said.

Released in June, Mr Liu returned to his family's home in Liaoyuan, in north-eastern Jilin province, where police kept a tight watch on him.

They surrounded his house, followed him and made it impossible for him to get a job. Mr Liu earlier said that police crashed into taxis he was in, and searched, detained and robbed him.

"The police in Liaoyuan treated me very badly. I couldn't bear them," Mr Liu said. They also ordered him to report his thoughts to them once a week, not to leave his home town and not to talk to foreign reporters. Mr Liu refused.

Mr Liu left his family home after his stepmother suffered mental disturbances because of the stress of police harassment.

He went to Peking last month to file an appeal asking to be left alone. Mr Liu said police threatened to arrest him again unless he returned to his home town.

The Human Rights in China report said police would cause so much trouble for anyone Mr Liu stayed with that he would be forced to leave.

It also said authorities refused to assign him a job or give him a licence for a small business like a street stall, and warned employers not to hire him.

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IN BRIEF

Algeria tops list of journalists' deaths

Paris — Some 51 journalists were killed and more than 100 jailed around the world last year, compared with 103 in 1994, the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said. The organisation reported that some countries — including Romania and Egypt — allow their criminal justice systems to curtail press freedom. Algeria led the list of journalists killed on the job, with 22 assassinated last year. AP

Nastase may sue

Bucharest — Romanian former tennis star Ilie Nastase, who is running for mayor of Bucharest, threatened to sue over newspaper claims he had served the communist-era Securitate spy service. Reuters

Sex toy arrests

Peking — Police arrested six people after complaints that obscene toys had been packaged in snack foods for children. The Guangdong Wanda food factory allegedly packaged plastic models of a man and woman having sexual intercourse. AP

Military build-up

Canberra — Australia's military is to boost its combat capability, including beefing up offshore fighting forces, to keep pace with Asian powers locked in an arms-buying spree. Reuters

Harassment claim

New York — A woman who worked for George C Scott has accused the actor of sexual harassment. Julie Wright claims Scott made demeaning sexual comments, tried to kiss and fondle her and asked her to have his baby. Reuters

China quake kills 8

Peking — At least eight people were killed and nearly 100 injured when an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale jolted China's Inner Mongolia region. Reuters

Death penalty stays

Strasbourg — The Russian Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, ruled out any early abolition of the death penalty, despite pressure from the Council of Europe which Russia joined in February. AP



Peace steps: A woman pushes her belongings into the Bosnian-Serb held Grbavica district of Sarajevo, where many Muslims are returning home. Photograph: Oleg Popov

Summit fails to ban anti-personnel mines

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

Humanitarian agencies yesterday described the United Nations Inhumane Weapons Convention conference, which ended without a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, as a "dismal failure".

Diplomatic sources stressed the achievements of the two-week conference, but the British working group on landmines, which includes Oxfam, Save the Children, United Christian Aid, said its decision was "riddled with loopholes, delays and lack of enforcement. In essence this is a mine layers' charter".

The conference, held in Geneva, agreed to ban laser weapons designed to blind people but failed to agree a blanket ban on the anti-personnel mines which kill or maim an estimated 20,000 people a year — mostly civilians — after the wars in which they were laid have ended.

Nations do not have to com-

ply with the convention until nine years after it comes into force, meaning that "dumb" anti-personnel mines — which do not self-destruct after a certain period of time — can be laid, legally for the next decade.

After that, it will be illegal to lay "dumb" mines. But although the convention is legally binding, there are no provisions for verifying compliance.

The revised protocol introduces strict standards for the self-destructing mines, which remain legal, to ensure they are easy to detect. New standards for marking minefields are also included, except when "direct enemy military action makes it impossible to comply". That is likely to be the case in many future armed conflicts.

Aid agencies criticised the protocol for "legitimising" the "smart" mines which critics say are not sufficiently reliable to remove the threat to civilians completely.

The conference, attended by more than 80 countries, has ex-

tended the scope of the convention to civil wars, where almost all the recent carnage caused by anti-personnel mines has occurred. But many internal operations, such as those in Chechnya or Kashmir, could be classified as "internal security" or police actions, thus evading the convention.

Humanitarian groups also attacked the definition of anti-personnel mines, described as those "primarily designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person". This could exclude dual-use mines, designed to destroy light vehicles, and the sub-munitions from weapons like Britain's JP-233 anti-runway weapon, which are "primarily" designed to destroy runways and hinder their repair but which are also anti-personnel weapons.

The convention bans the transfer of anti-personnel mines to "non-state" groups — like Hizbollah or the IRA — but humanitarian agencies are also sceptical about enforcing that

part of the convention. Diplomatic sources insisted the convention would help. British Foreign Office Minister, David Davis, said yesterday: "The revised protocol will set new standards which will significantly reduce the dangers to innocent civilians. But it is only a step. Our goal is a total international ban on these weapons."

On 22 April Mr Davis announced Britain would destroy 46 per cent of its stock of about 20,000 anti-personnel mines immediately. It would destroy the remainder if a total worldwide ban was agreed — something that is now unlikely to happen in the near future.

The conference did succeed in agreeing provisions for penal sanctions against people seriously violating the protocol, although it might be difficult to discover who had laid mines, and for an annual conference to discuss land mines.

The next full review conference will take place in five years' time.

US Embassy quashes report of Harriman quitting Paris

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

The United States embassy in Paris has "categorically denied" that the ambassador, Pamela Harriman, is resigning her post or leaving France. The denial follows a series of reports that Ms Harriman, whose arrival in Paris as an appointee of President Clinton raised eyebrows in diplomatic circles, was standing down or had already left France. To support its denial, the US

Embassy took the unusual step of disseminating an internal memo, sent to all embassy staff when the first reports of her supposed resignation appeared. It says, in capital letters: "The Embassy of the United States in France would like to clarify that Ambassador Harriman is still in Paris and will remain at her post indefinitely. The duration of the mission for all American ambassadors is at the pleasure of the president of the United States."

While there can be no doubt that Ms Harriman is in Paris, has not resigned, and apparently has no intention of leaving before the end of Mr Clinton's first term as president, the wide currency given to reports of her resignation raise questions about the degree of support the 76-year-old ambassador enjoys in Washington, and specifically at the State Department. When it was pointed out that the initial reports of her departure came from Washington, a US embassy source in Paris said: "Washington is a hive of speculation and rumour and Ambassador Harriman has enemies like everyone else."

One of the first Paris reports of Ms Harriman's departure appeared in last week's *Paris Match* magazine, which showed a picture of Ms Harriman receiving an award from the French culture minister under

the heading, "Au revoir Madame l'ambassadeur". The caption said that Ms Harriman had left Paris on 17 April and had received the award "to remind her of the city she so loves".

This week's edition carries a grovelling apology, headed: "Pardon, Madame l'ambas-



Pamela Harriman: 'Does not envisage leaving'

sadeur." It says: "The ambassador wishes to clarify that she is still at her post in Paris and does not envisage leaving before the end of Bill Clinton's presidency next January. We present our apologies for the erroneous report."

The *Washington Post* article which fuelled US reports of her imminent departure, quoted Ms Harriman as saying that she would be "ready to go home"

after the autumn presidential elections.

She said her time in Paris had been "fascinating, but I've had enough", and she referred to long working days, the "limit to how long you can live a public life" and the difficulties of being single, and a woman in an ambassadorial post: "Many things I do would never be asked of a male ambassador."

The general tone of her remarks, and the fact that she was quoted as referring to the elections, rather than to the end of Mr Clinton's term, or to his possible re-election, permitted her remarks to be interpreted as meaning that she was leaving sooner rather than later.

Whatever the origin of the story, the Paris embassy's determination to scotch the story indicates it has been embarrassed and that Ms Harriman's position as ambassador has been undermined.

The affair comes at a time when the US particularly needs a strong presence in Paris. Relations are going through an awkward phase, with differences in emphasis, if not outright rivalry, on Middle East policy, a year-old dispute about alleged CIA activities in France rumbling on, and a report in the French media yesterday, alleging that a US spy plane had overflown sensitive military installations earlier this year.

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Indian leader's guru in jail for fraud

TIM MCGIRK
New Delhi

An Indian guru favoured by the prime minister, Narasimha Rao, for his sorcery and political savvy, was sent to a New Delhi jail yesterday on charges of fraud.

India has throngs of bogus holy men but few are as successful or controversial as Chandraswamy, 47, who looks like an over-fed werewolf. Wearing white robes and with golden talismans clanking around his neck, the hairy "godman", as the Indian press calls him, was led off by police to Tihar jail, one of the most violent prisons in Asia.

The swami's arrest is also a measure of how far the prime minister himself has fallen. Until now, Mr Rao's patronage has given Chandraswamy far greater protection from the law than any sorcerer's talisman. But with Mr Rao's Congress party facing defeat in parliamentary elections, which end on 9 May, Chandraswamy's spell of invulnerability is fast fading.

It was a lowly chief magistrate in New Delhi who finally had Chandraswamy arrested, after Supreme Court justices and cabinet ministers had tried in the past - and failed. They were shocked by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), similar to Britain's MI5, which is under Mr Rao's control.

"The CBI, which operates directly under the prime minister, had been dilly-dallying on the investigation due to the government's lukewarm attitude," said chief metropolitan magis-

trate Prem Kumar. "Such people who felt they were beyond the clutches of the law are now facing prosecution. Such people are no longer untouchable."

If the magistrate had been as scathing about the prime minister just a few weeks ago, he would have found himself banished to the guerrilla-infested jungles of the North-east as punishment. As one Supreme Court lawyer said: "This magistrate wouldn't have had the guts to do this before. He realises that Rao is a setting sun."

What finally brought the jet-setting swami into a nose-dive was an eight-year old complaint made by a British-based Indian pickle merchant, Chandraswamy allegedly cheated the businessman, Lakshu Bhai Pathak, out of \$100,000 on the false promise that he would use his government influence to obtain a newspaper contract.

Bail was denied for the swami but he is expected to plead poor health in hopes of being moved out of an over-crowded jail cell in 105 degree heat to an air-conditioned hospital.

In Madras, where he was arrested on Thursday night, Chandraswamy wailed to the judge: "I am surprised I have been arrested. I am unwell." The swami was then flown to New Delhi, made to appear in court and sent to jail.

The prime minister, campaigning for the third and final round of India's elections, refused to comment on his guru's arrest. Mr Rao and the swami had been friends for 27 years, and when Mr Rao became prime minister in 1991, Chan-

draswamy was accorded better access to him than even cabinet ministers; only the guru's Mercedes-Benz was allowed entry up the driveway to the premier's mansion, earning him the nickname of "Mr Rao's Rasputin". The guru often boasted that the prime minister called him every day. But no longer.

Known as a "tantric", a kind of sorcerer who relies on incantations and mystical diagrams, Chandraswamy has made previous accusations against him vanish into the air. The previous minister for internal security, Rajesh Pilot, alleged last September that Chandraswamy had harboured a gangland assassin.

Soon after making the charges, Mr Rao cast Mr Pilot into the political wilderness, making him minister in charge of forests and environment. Reports that the guru had acted as a beguiler for an industrialist, who allegedly passed on \$460,000 to the prime minister, were never chased up by police. In February, the CBI, probably at Mr Rao's prodding, insisted that the case against the holy man be closed.

The Supreme Court, which lately has been the one lone voice against government corruption, refused to drop the cases against the notorious guru. In an unprecedented move, the court also criticised the CBI for its bias towards the guru; the CBI director, according to some reports, was an occasional visitor to the Chandraswamy's ashram, where dignitaries would touch the "godman's" manicured toes in obeisance.



Unforeseen: The prime minister's guru Chandraswamy arriving at court following his arrest on swindling charges

Chandraswamy's intrigues go beyond India. Among his devotees are said to be some very eminent people, including businessmen, stars of stage and screen and a pair of African

presidents. Acquaintances claim that the supernatural powers of which Chandraswamy boasts - mind-reading, prediction and spell-casting - pale beside his ability to dupe

his high-flying followers through flattery and appeals to their greed. "I have never done anything wrong," he once protested. "Can the clouds ever eclipse the

sun? They will ultimately scatter and truth will prevail." In India, plenty of politicians are dreading the day when the truth about their links to the "godman" finally shine through.

Yeltsin promises talks on Chechnya

PHIL REEVES
Moscow

Boris Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, both made fresh moves to clear the path for negotiations over the Chechen war yesterday - underlining their desperation to convince voters they can solve the conflict before it further damages the President's re-election prospects.

But Mr Yeltsin, who has promised to settle the affair before next month's election, also conceded it was possible that nothing will result until after the poll. There may be a "delay" in the outcome of any talks because the issue is "far from simple", he said during a campaign visit to Yuzovsk, north-east of Moscow.

The beleaguered President, who trails the Communist leader, Gennady Zyuganov, in most polls, said he intended to announce a formula for a settlement in Chechnya during a visit to the republic later this month. He said talks would involve three parties - the Moscow-backed Chechen government, the Russian Federation, and separatist leaders - although it is unclear whether the latter would agree to take part.

Mr Yeltsin has made clear that he was not willing to grant complete independence to Chechnya. But Mr Primakov appeared to take a more flexible line. "Everything is negotiable, all questions can be put on the table, including any kind of status for Chechnya," he said. However, it is understood he is still against full independence.

He made his remarks in Strasbourg where he was attending a meeting of foreign ministers from the Council of Europe, which admitted Russia as a member earlier this year.

But the Kremlin appears to be genuinely pushing for a settlement in Chechnya in the hope of limiting the damage of the 17-month conflict which has claimed more than 30,000 lives and has led to the destruction of its capital, Grozny.

It remains questionable whether Chechen rebel leader, Zelimkhan Yandarbayev, can enter talks so soon after last month's death of his predecessor, Dzhokhar Dudayev, without producing a backlash.

Aznar takes power with pledge to give it away

ELIZABETH NASH
Madrid

Spain's conservative Popular Party leader, Jose Maria Aznar, who narrowly won general elections two months ago, yesterday promised a dramatic transfer of power from Madrid to the regions that he predicted "could unleash a process without historical precedent".

Laying out his programme for government before MPs, Mr Aznar proposed "a new territorial arrangement of power that recognises and respects the different peoples of Spain; their diversity, heterogeneity and the factors that differenti-

ate them". To achieve this, "consensus was more than an aim, it was a necessity".

He also insisted on the urgent need for economic austerity, essential to fulfil the criteria for European monetary union, he said, and to "make up for lost time". But he promised that this too would be achieved through dialogue and consensus.

The outgoing prime minister, Felipe Gonzalez, making his first opposition speech for 13 years, welcomed Mr Aznar's conciliatory tone. He promised he would be critical, but would not trade in insults and devoted much of his reply to emphasising points of agreement.

Perhaps Mr Gonzalez was keeping his powder dry, but it was sweetness and light in the first face-off for months between Spain's two leading politicians. "This legislature is going to be much less tense and much more fun than the last," he noted at one point, to laughter and applause.

Mr Aznar is assured of winning the vote today that will install him as prime minister after sealing pacts with Spain's principal regional forces: nationalists from Catalonia, the Basque country and the Canary Islands. In doing so, he has for the first time united Spain's democratic conservative forces. It

is a historic achievement - even if this united front is not guaranteed to hold. For the moment, however, Mr Aznar has secured 25 crucial parliamentary votes that deliver him an absolute majority.

At the heart of his programme lies a formula for increasing regional autonomy, under which Spain's 17 regions will retain 30 per cent of income tax raised in each region. But the details, including a mechanism to prevent the poorer regions from losing out, remain to be worked out.

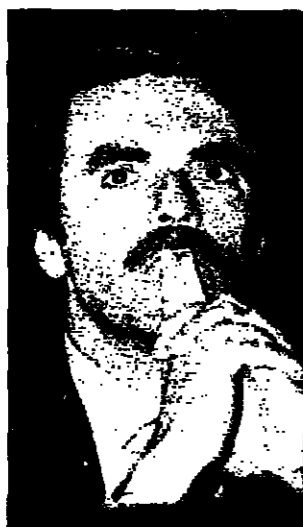
This commitment, the product of his deal with the Catalan nationalists led by Jordi Pujol,

goes beyond anything attempted by any government since the 1978 post-Francoist constitution that recognised the rights of Spain's regions and peoples. It buries what was until 4 March, the day after election day, the most conspicuous legacy of the PP's Francoist origins: the commitment to a centralised "Espanolista" system of rule.

Mr Aznar's choice of words yesterday, his assurance that "each region should reach the maximum levels of self-government", his appeal to "all Spaniards and peoples of Spain", mark an about-turn in approach that reveals the hallmarks of his pact with Mr Pu-

jol's Convergence and Union party. The five MPs of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) finally decided this week to climb aboard, after the PP promised to enact in full a devolution deal agreed by the Socialists but not completed.

Mr Aznar promised public spending cuts, deregulation, privatisation and the simplification of bureaucracy that was stifling small businesses, all with the aim of combating "our great national problem" - unemployment, the worst in Europe. Pensions and welfare provisions would be protected, but Mr Aznar demanded more efficiency and less waste.



Aznar: Wants to promote Spain's regions

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The other championship race

Small-town France is up for the cup – and the league, too. The unprecedented success of the 'paysans' from Auxerre against big city rivals has become symbolic of a divided nation, says Mary Dejevsky

As dusk gathers this evening, 22 players will take the field at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris for a cup final unlike any other. It is not only that the two teams contesting the match – Auxerre and Nîmes – were unfancied for the cup and that both come from out of town. It is that one of them, Auxerre, also heads the French league.

While England prepares to see whether the expensive big names of Manchester United can carry off both the Premier League and FA Cup, Auxerre, the team from a town of only 40,000 people, is on course to become the first small town in France to "do the double".

To arrive where it is today, Auxerre has slain a good number of large dragons, including the southern ruffians of Olympique Marseille. But the signal event in its progress was the epic match on 30 March when it beat the fast-living, star-studded Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) 3-0 at home and snatched its place at the top of the league table. That was when all France found itself drawn into the battle for the double.

Five weeks on, Auxerre's football team finds itself carrying the aspirations of thousands, even millions, of determinedly non-metropolitan French people. And among the most prominent supporters is the screen idol Gérard Depardieu, who has followed the team's fortunes avidly.

Auxerre has come to represent the provinces versus Paris, the countryside versus the town, the "real" France against wicked commercialism – "us" against "them".

When the PSG supporters came to Auxerre, it is related, they spent much of the match chanting scornfully, "Paysans, paysans!" (peasants, peasants). At the opposing team. By the end of the match, the chant had been proudly taken up by the home supporters. "Paysans, paysans!" they yelled back, and proud of it. With Auxerre, as one French reporter noted recently, "you start by talking about football, and suddenly you find you are talking about France".

Auxerre and its surrounding region is French heartland. Less

than two hours' drive from Paris, this is Burgundy. It does not have the feel of remoteness and neglect that often characterises rural France. It is genuine small-town France, earning its living from flourishing farms, orchards and vineyards; proud and self-sufficient.

The town itself is a once-walled medieval city with a lopsided cathedral where Jean of Arc reputedly stopped in 1429 and whose second tower somehow never got built. The Yonne river flows placidly below. You can still glimpse sloping woods and fields from the old town.

In late spring, with the cherry and apple trees in blossom, Auxerre looks like every small French town ought to look. It is washed and brushed almost fanatically. Its road has flower borders and the unmistakable sounds of piano practice waft through the air. The cobbled street are lined with small shops, in the jewellers' windows, at the clocks and watches are at the right time, and the *moteurs* self-consciously display all manner of animal parts for eating. The place of sport, but especially football, is at once apparent. There are more sports equipment shops than any one small town could reasonably expect to support. Aft just now, with the team on course for the double, the excitement is tangible.

Big white banners have been hung over what were once the town gates, proclaiming when and where Auxerre is next at home. A highstreet chocolate shop – Monsieur Flakia, who won the "Eclair prize for white chocolate" at the Montclair international chocolate fair – has festooned its window with the football team's blue and white ribbons and does a popular line in chocolate footballs: F24 for the smallest, up to F300 and beyond for the larger ones. Fly-sheets everywhere advertise the special train that will be laid on for the cup final.

The population of Auxerre is young: almost 6 per cent are under the age of 10. The unemployment rate is well below the French average of almost 12 per cent. There is money, but not overt wealth. Over the past



Guy Roux, who says his team has had to beat the media's Paris bias: 'It's a question of the dominated against the dominant, the colonised against the colonialis'

Empire

two decades, the city council has encouraged the football team as an asset that promotes Auxerre and puts it on the national, even international, map. It publishes figures attesting to the commercial and other benefits it says the team's success has brought.

The policy is not universally popular. "Sometimes you think that maybe the money would be better spent on housing or helping poor people," a young woman at the Chamber of Commerce hazarded. "No, not every one thinks it's so wonderful." The fact is, though, that a great many Auxerrois are fully behind their team, and the mayor was voted back last June, when many a long-serving French mayor was drummed from office. What is more, the recently built 20,000-seater stadium has been filled to capacity for its last three home matches.

The secret of Auxerre's success, however, lies not just in the town's youthful population, its

relative affluence, or the support of the town council. Much of it can be put down to one man: Guy Roux, the 57-year-old team manager. He has been in his job for 34 years – surely a record for a football manager – and took

the man who "discovered" Eric Cantona as a 15-year-old in Marseille – and kept him at Auxerre for seven years.

"Eric," Roux said, pointing to the battered vinyl and chrome chair in his ramshackle

Among the team's most avid followers is the film idol Gérard Depardieu



the team steadily from the fifth to the first division, from where it has never once been relegated. Roux is a smallish, roundish and hugely dynamic man whose reputation precedes him wherever he goes. He is gruff and charming by turns, speaks his mind and owes nothing to anyone. For the record, he is also

office beside the training pitch, "would always sit there. Always. He is a big character, a strong character, very intelligent. He would come in, and we would just talk, for an hour or more."

There are many myths surrounding Roux. It is said, for instance, that he patrols outside his players' hotel rooms before

big matches to make sure they stay in and don't keep the wrong company. "Yes, that's true," he said. "You see, many of the players are just young kids really; they need discipline."

Then from the subject of his players' discipline he went off at what appeared to be a tangent: "You know the worst thing that happened to our country? May 1968, the student revolt, that's what. Two generations of young people have been ruined. After that, young people didn't see why they should take any instructions from anyone. Discipline went completely to pieces. It was a catastrophe, and the effects are still being felt."

How about reports that he forbids his players from buying fast, showy cars because it gives the wrong impression. "No," he countered quickly. "I don't forbid them. But I do advise them. The thing is that people who come to football matches aren't rich and they have to pay for their ticket out

of their hard-earned income. If they see that the players of this small town are driving round in new cars and changing them every few months they resent it, justifiably."

Roux has long set himself up as a father-figure to aspiring youngsters. The pitches of the Abbé Deschamps sports complex are dotted with small footballers being coached by Auxerre players. Roux often goes to watch after supervising the team session. He picked most of his first team as youngsters and had them work their way up. He is famously tightfisted and does not buy ready-made stars.

A widespread idea of Roux as a country bumpkin naïve in the ways of the world, however, is far from the truth. When you ask Roux about the notion that Auxerre has somehow come to represent the "real" France against the big city, he agrees wholeheartedly. It was utterly predictable, he said, that Aux-

erre only came to national attention when it beat Paris Saint-Germain. "All the media are based in Paris; nothing really counts for them unless it affects Paris. In that, it's a question of the dominated versus the dominant; the colonised against the colonialis't.

His desk is a mountain of post. Is it true that he gets fan mail from all over France? "Yes, and hate mail too – after we beat Marseille, you should have seen the letters."

This afternoon, Auxerre's supporters will set off in their special train for the big match in Paris. They are expected back at 3am. If they win, Auxerre are almost sure of the double – they are four points clear in the league, with only two games still to play. But even if they fail, the defiant chants of "Paysans, paysans" will continue to echo through small-town France for a very long time. And you can guarantee that Auxerre will be back next year.

Jo Brand's week

It is our final show in Sydney this week. Reaction has been pretty good and we have not been savaged by the press. However, one woman in the audience obviously thought I was taking "The Wreck Of The Hesperus" too far. She was heard to remark to a friend, "I'm sure that Jo and has put talcum powder in her hair to make herself look older." I wish, reminded me that in my youth, dry shampoo was quite popular for a while until everyone realised it made them look like they had severe dandruff. As far as any attempt I might make to make myself look worse than I am concerned, they are a very long way off. Following a serious brush with hair dye several years ago which turned me into a blind Elephant Woman for four days, I just left my hair to do what it wanted, but I'm not giving it a helping hand.

There are slight differences in the use of the English language over here that give something of a cartoonish quality to news reports. For example, the word "beaten" tends to get replaced by the word "bashed". Therefore, when you are reading a headline such as "Policeman bashed in Sydney", it is more reminiscent of the *Beano* than a serious newspaper report. Australians are equally contemptuous of some of our words. Apparently, we don't pronounce vitamin or maroon (ie, "marone") properly, and we say duvet instead of "doona". Still, perhaps we'll all fall into line when we start talking the universal language ... American.

The Sydney Morning Herald chose to reveal a few choice facts about Fergie this week, including her obsession with psychic forecasts and the information that she stopped taking Prozac to enjoy sex more. Many women seem to cling desperately to mysticism to reveal their future, which is probably an indicator of how keen they are to change their present situation. I think this is another way of avoiding taking responsibility for one's actions, something that, until recently, women have been forced into doing. Fergie was spending 30 hours a week, apparently, indulging in attempts to predict her fate. A quick glance at the papers might have been easier. As for her Prozac experience, is

there anyone in Britain who is not taking it? I thought I'd got past the stage where doctors give drugs on demand, but so many people I know are popping Prozac, theory, this country should be like a hippy, with lots of happy bunnies jump around and enjoying their lives. But not having a jump, apparently, as it acts libido.

I thought Mary Whitehouse had been quiet for a long time, so I was reassuring to see her pop and snarl at the recently deceased Denis Potter's latest television treat. I haven't seen it but I am sure there was play there for her to get her teeth into. Poo! Mary W... she's so predictable. Didn't it be great if just the once she loved the



How about the Rooster, Mary?



odd E-word and laid into *Antiques Roadshow* for its encouragement of human greed. Or perhaps she could direct her wrath at *Songs Of Praise*, because most of the congregation are just trying to get their phizzes on telly. The problem with Mary is that she has become such an institution that people aren't surprised when she flies in on the coat-tails of a well-aimed punch or a peeping penis. It's important to keep your detractors on their toes. Come on, Mary – shock us.

I would also be very shocked if for five minutes Virginia Bottomley stopped trumpeting her lottery as if it was some God-given personal triumph she alone had dreamed up. She is obviously overcome with deep joy as well, because she can call various Labour MPs, who are not so keen, "hypocrites", because their constituencies are receiving money. It's so black and white in Toryland. A few quid to paint a community centre in St Albans does not wipe out the thousands of desperate, poor people spending their last few quid in a hopeless attempt to pull themselves out of hell. Still, I suppose it keeps them quiet on a Saturday. Doesn't it, Virg?

Some poor policeman in England got into trouble with his hairstyle this week after he transferred out of muffs and went back on the beat. The style involved a ponytail, which is not acceptable on the streets. Worse, it was

not even a tidy ponytail, having been described by the Met representative as "not attractively groomed" and like "a doctored dog's tail".

I know how the poor guy feels. If you are in a position such as nurse or policeman, you are constantly called upon to live up to a stereotype. I proudly admit that as a psychiatric nurse, I was a total scruffing and the despair of the nursing hierarchy. However, the people we deal with in the psychiatric emergency clinic didn't give a toss. After all, having a tidy bob and a smart suit never helped anyone acutely anxious to feel calmer.

I was sent a letter warning me that the Oxford look was unacceptable and I'd better twin-suit up or I'd be out of a job. I handed in my resignation and (thank God) the contents of the fashion-obsessed bosses' letter were immediately retracted. It wouldn't happen now and that's why I'm glad I got out of the health service when I did. When my career falls apart and I go back, I hope a Labour government less obsessed with looks over substance will let me breeze back looking like Worzel Gummidge. Let's hope they've thrown out the shoulder pads by then.



So, who needs shoulder pads?

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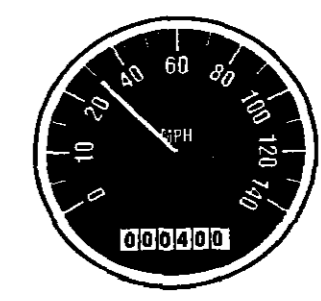
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What Middle England wants: the Grumpy Party

Middle England isn't a real place with grid references - Basildon in the east, Harrogate in the north, Bournemouth in the south, Worcester in the west. Middle England is more like something in the air, a background moan. That moan rose to one of its periodic crescendos this week in the district council elections. No amount of psephological tweaking could disguise the routing of the Tories; their supporters show no signs of returning to the fold before the main event.

Where there is affection for Tony Blair, it is love on the rebound. And highly conditional at that. Middle England has not converted to the milk-and-water precepts of New Labour. The mood music is a sort of tetchy, on-edge Philip Glass. Labour may take some pleasure from these results, but it would be unwise to take too much. The electoral justice of Middle England might ordain that the pendulum should swing. Party preferences might shift to Labour. But beneath all that, there is a different movement that should worry both parties: the next general election will be fought amid harsh disapproval of the political system as a whole.

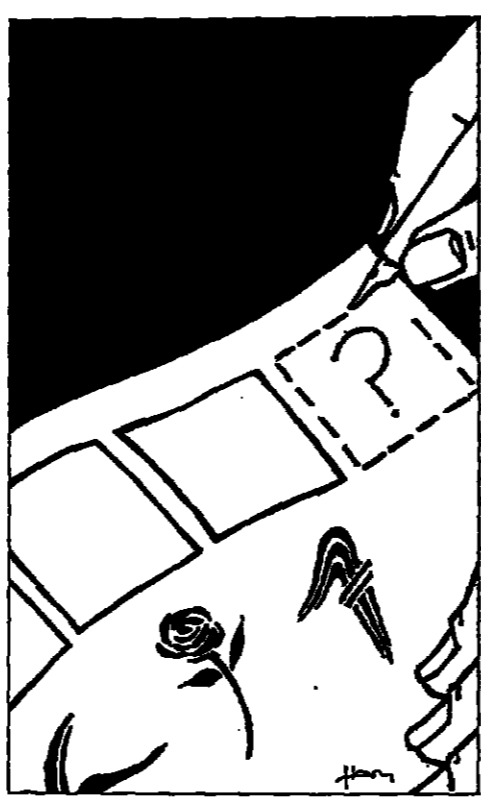
It is still difficult to see where this disaffection might lead. Some optimistic analysts believe it could eventually lead to institutional reform. But the picture is mixed. First-past-the-post voting is more popular now than a decade ago, but more people want to reform the House of Lords and see the Scots achieve some form of independence or devolution. Yet Charter '88, the constitutional reform lobby group, would secure little name recognition in Tesco in Tewkesbury.

No, New Labour's mood might have been

improved by the results, but the mood of the country is not positive. The country is disgruntled and grumpy. Seventeen years of Conservative government have sown through many of the planks on which identity and security are built - and they include a reliable public water supply, and Aunt Sally British Rail as well as Essex County Council. This sense of anxiety has a material base. "Downsizing" is about more than job cuts. We are "downsizing" our expectations, coming to terms with long-run deflation, slower growth and stagnant living standards. It means ceasing to think of houses as appreciating assets which, for all the pressure of negative equity in parts of the country, most of us still do. Throughout the 19th century, rich and poor rented, for the very good reason that other more liquid assets offered a higher return. Downsizing means intensified competition for secure jobs, and that in turn means aspiring for one's children's future in dramatically different terms from the way our own parents pictured ours.

It is not that Basildon is suddenly worse off. Real incomes are still rising; unemployment is under 8 per cent. In Oxfordshire, it is just over half that, but the Tories still lost heavily on Thursday. People are spending, we reported the other day the dense penetration of British households by personal computers. Useful and fascinating as they may be, they are not a necessity of life, even for families with games-playing 11-year-olds.

The Tories are right. If the "feel-good" factor was based on objective indices, they ought to see their flock turning away from Blairite temptation. But how little we know about the subterranean



causes of changes in sentiment. It is partly a matter of expecting things to worsen. Middle England starts to fear for its old age; who will pay for care? Will pensions be enough to support the designated lifestyle? Will the children of dislocated families rally round? Who will pay for post-school education with all this talk of loans and students having to contribute toward tuition costs, and what kind of jobs will this education lead to? Once, the expansion of the "service class" - middle-income suppliers of services - seemed unstoppable. But now? Well, listen to Martin Meaux, the controversial president of the Law Society. His noisy foot-stamping is the sound of the backwoodsmen of a profession fighting competition, simultaneously wanting to restore the respect and trust of the public and yet force the public to pay more for simple legal services.

As yet, this edgy, tetchy mood has not found full political voice. Euroscepticism picks up some of the mood but its exponents are still too shrill to really command the political agenda. The Tory pot does contain some of the ingredients that could go into a populism opposed to economic insecurity - neo-populism, cultural authoritarianism, technicism. But it also contains economic liberalism which promotes markets and competition - the very beavers of insecurity for many. (The inability of the elements which make up that party looks daily ever greater.)

We gaze across the Atlantic and wonder about the scope here for a Perot businessman-as-savior or Buchanan-protectionist-populist. Sir James Goldsmith rides across the Channel on his piebald charger. Mohamed al-Fayed looms over Knights

bridge. But what strange mixtures they are - one a Jewish cosmopolitan, the other an Arab with attitude who has gone left rather than right to find political leverage against the establishment which fears and despises him in equal measure. Yet despite these new arrivals on the political scene, it is difficult to imagine a full-blown Perotism or Buchananism emerging in Britain's more sedate, controlled politics.

The ideological tenor of the times is hard to catch. There may be scope for a "left" response to discontent and dismay, a turn back toward collectivist solutions, taxes on the very wealthy, re-regulation to protect middle-class jobs. In an anxious California in the early Thirties, demagogues promised a chicken in every pot; perhaps Essex would warm to an earnings-related pension for every 65-year-old, paid for by a thick slice into corporate dividends or incomes over £50,000 a year. Who could definitively rule out a political future for neo-egalitarianism?

As yet neither the right, with all its contradictions, nor the left, with its new-found caution about not raising expectations too high, fully addresses this mood of grumpiness head on. As a result, there is a sense that politics is not doing its job fully, when something profound and powerful about the nation's mood is not expressed. Yet perhaps we should be grateful that populism has not made further headway. Billerica is never going to be the breeding ground of political passion. But this carping and resentful mood is likely to survive the defeat of the Tories and the advent of Labour. We have probably found the Big Idea of the latter part of the decade - grumpiness.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Jerusalem': counterblast from Scotland's green and pleasant land

Sir: Hymns interceding for the nation do have their place, but the words of "Jerusalem" are wholly irrelevant in a Scottish context (Letters, 1 May).

As a student training for the Ministry in the Church of Scotland, I warmly welcome the proposals of the Kirk's Panel on Worship to replace the 1973 Church Hymnary (Third Edition) with a new hymn book. The CH3 has been an inadequate source, the result being that many congregations still use the 1927 Revised Church Hymnary supplemented by contemporary works such as *Mission Praise*. The primary purpose of hymn singing is to praise the living God, not for nostalgia, tradition or nostalgia.

I was dismayed by the offensive tone of Lord Broadbridge's letter. I have never heard the noble Lord speak, but there is a possibility that his accent is weird, amusing or even incomprehensible to Scottish ears. If

a European Union commissioner were to make such comments about England, there would no doubt be an outcry from the Eurosceptics; meanwhile Scotland has had to endure an appalling Conservative government unelected by Scots and the uncouth mutterings of legislators in the House of Lords elected by nobody.

The Church of Scotland, given its Presbyterian system of church government, with congregational Kirk Sessions, 49 area Presbyteries and the annual General Assembly which with authority in their own areas, is a model of democratic federalism. Maybe such familiarity is a reason why a federal Europe and a federal Britain (including a Scottish Parliament) is attractive to many Scots.

MATTHEW Z. ROSS
Edinburgh

Sir: In the hubbub following the Church of Scotland hymnary

panel's decision to announce that some hymns may need to be removed, what is distasteful is Lord Broadbridge's personal comment about the Rev Charles Robertson, a man he has apparently never met (Letters, 1 May). The Rev Robertson, secretary of the hymnary, is one of those liturgists notorious for his resistance to fads of political correctness. To suggest that he is either small-minded or idiotic advances reasoned debate not one whit.

The issues raised by those charged with preparing a new hymnary are concerned with shifts in culture and language. Not everyone will find feminist challenges to the well-known words and forms congenial, but we cannot wish them away. It is the responsibility of those who prepare worship to find language that will reflect the good, the true, and the beautiful in equal measure. Gender-inclusive language does not *per se* threaten any of these concerns,

as the United Reformed Church demonstrated in its 1990 hymnary *Rejoice and Sing*. Six years ago, the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain produced a collection of papers and essays entitled *Singing the Faith*. Much of what it said then rehearsed the issues confronting those who oversee the production of new hymn books. Interested readers can make themselves informed critics by reading that book or Brian Wren's *What Language Shall I Borrow?*

In the meantime I hope that Lord Broadbridge, whom I have never met, has the opportunity to attend the Kirk of Canongate, where the Rev Robertson exercises a ministry distinguished by decency, order and the affection of his parishioners.

The Rev Dr PAUL P. J. SHEPPY
Barnoldswick, Lancashire

Sir: I have been a member of the Church of Scotland for

over 50 years, and an organist for nearly 30. During that time, I have neither sung "Jerusalem", nor been asked to play it. Far from dropping a well-loved hymn for "politically correct" reasons, might I suggest that our hymnary committee have rightly concluded that the hymn has simply fallen into disuse?

ISABEL M. J. JEFFREY
Stenton, Lothian

Sir: Why be surprised the Church of Scotland no longer offers to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land?

MAY D. BERRY
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

Sir: I have had difficulty in treating this hymn seriously since someone said to me, "The answer to the first verse is 'No', to the second 'Fetch them yourself'."

The Rev KEITH C. BLACKBURN
Sevenoaks, Kent

Civic 'fraud' in Hackney

Sir: Your report on Bernard Crofton ("Housing chief is fraud and liar says report", 1 May) raises more questions than it answers.

If Bernard Crofton was, or is, guilty of fraud, at what point was Hackney council (leading Labour councillors and senior officers) aware of this? If it was prior to his suspension in October 1994, why was he not also charged with fraud and the evidence presented to the disciplinary sub-committee last year?

Your report refers to the "Blue Document" which, after interviewing Andrew Arden QC, Ian MacDonald QC is reported to dismiss as "untrue and fabricated". In view of the importance of that document in the appeal hearing, why was Andrew Arden QC either unable or unwilling to give evidence to the appeal panel?

You refer to the names of 600 employees being secretly passed to the Immigration Department for checking. Whilst there is no denying that names were passed to the Immigration Department, the only person to have publicly linked this with Bernard Crofton was Brian Sedgmore MP, who hid behind parliamentary privilege to do so. I am still waiting to see him make this allegation without the use of parliamentary privilege.

I cannot comment on the MacDonald report as I have not yet received a copy but if I, or indeed any Hackney councillor, is going to take it seriously, it will need to provide full documentation to back up the allegation that Bernard Crofton is a "fraud and liar".

CLIVE KEVIN DAWES
Leader of the Opposition,
London Borough of Hackney
London EC1

Yearning for a new MP

Sir: I am writing to thank David Aaronovitch ("The Diva from Hell", 3 May) for his pointed parody of our dreadful Conservative MP for Gravesham, Mr Jacques Arnould.

I do not wish to make a party point, but, as a resident of Gravesham, I increasingly despair at being represented by a man who simply shouts, bays, and whines, and who sits in the Commons like a malign schoolboy at one of the rear desks.

Gravesham is an increasingly fine borough, and I crave an early election in the hope that we can replace Mr Arnould with a more worthy representative possessing at least some dignity and gravitas.

Professor PHILIP STY
Gravesham

Arrest me

Sir: A spectator at a football match has been found guilty of using "threatening words and behaviour" for swearing and gesticulating at a Manchester United player (report, 1 May). I hope the legal system will cope with the flood of cases which will follow this precedent. I await a visit from the authorities while asking for 3,264 similar offences to be taken into consideration.

PAUL FOX
Harrow,
Middlesex

DAVID AARONOVITCH

Keep off the grass

If you were to compile a list entitled "the 10 Most Unpopular Pieces of Advice to Give to English people", number four or five after "always give up your seat for a foreigner" and "the boys are playing soccer in the street again, I suggest you move your car" might be "save water - pave over your lawn".

Yet this is exactly what Severn Trent Water - concerned about its ability to service its customers this summer - has done in a leaflet circulated this week. The company believes the British climate is changing, which will mean that summer droughts become a regular occurrence. Thankfully, they are keen to recommend ways in which gardeners can adapt to these altered circumstances.

Cue condemnations by Labour MPs (no scent more middle-class outrage over the depredations (privatised utilities) and statements of defiance from last-loving retired bank manager throughout the Midlands. Their fathers and grandfathers fought against somebody-or-other precisely to prevent the laws of England being paved over.

And there is indeed something worrying about all this. What suggestions might other public services and utilities come up with for ways in which we can use their product more efficiently? How about the local health trusts "Accident? Ever thought about self-suturing?" South Wey's "Save space. Sit on mup". Or, best of all, and most universal: "Children? Why bother?"

Oddly, that confirmation of the impact of global warming should come in a flyer from Severn Trent, and not from John Sumner's lot over at Environment. Call me old-fashioned, but I still believe that the Government's few remaining functions are to tell citizens when they are about to be hit by meteorites, catapulted by global war or plunged into low ice Age.

But this does not make Severn Trent wrong. For, however pertinent their advice may be, life in this country would be much better if gardeners did indeed get rid of their lawns.

QUOTE UNQUOTE

It's difficult to go on public transport now. I used to enjoy going on the Tube because it's an actor's job to look at people. Now they look at me all the time - Richard Wilson, Victor Meldrew of *TV's One Foot in the Grave*.

Few women in the public eye reach 40 without someone from their past "revealing all" to the tabloids - Selma Scott, television personality Mr Field. I am now going to insert this soft tube into your rectum - Doctor at the beginning of Dennis Potter's *Kareoke*. I changed over half-way through to watch the snooker - Mary Whitehouse, veteran TV clean-up campaigner and Potter fan. I'm always on a treadmill of having to keep going. A good year simply means that you have to pay more taxes - Felicity Kendall, actress. Chocolate has had a bad rap. If people brush their teeth regularly there is nothing wrong with eating chocolate or confectionery - Dr Mike Jardine, dental expert.

Yes, yes, it is coming. No one can hide the sun with his fingers -asser Arafat, PLO president, on the prospect of a Palestinian state. I can't go in there, it's a restricted area - Rivers Howgill, day nager at the Royal Albert Hall, as the building's two female ghosts appeared into the kitchens.

Orwellian incident on the 8.33

Sir: The 8.33 service from Victoria to Dover Priory was held up at Rochester for a quarter of an hour this morning (30 April). It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining. Not a hint of the wrong sort of snow, of craftily falling leaves, of boogian elements aboard the train, of points failure, of malfunctioning carriage couplings, of industrial action, of fatalities on the line.

No, this morning the dying remnants of British Rail battled heroically against a new and even more insidious enemy: the Wrong Sort of Passenger. The delay, we were loudly and proudly informed by our guard, was due to the sudden discovery on board our train of an "illegal immigrant" who held neither valid ticket nor passport, and whom the police, once they arrived on the scene, would shortly be detaining.

The guard, with his Orwellian telescreen-tones, would clearly have felt most at

home on the Deutsche Reichsbahn in the late 1930s, and evidently expected all respectable passengers to applaud his patriotic intervention. But instead there were exclamations of shock, of disbelief, of anger too. Anger that even a national institution as charmingly inept and slapdash as British Rail had finally been poisoned by the culture of frightening intolerance and creeping authoritarianism that our government promotes daily.

Mr Howard's long-lost Romanian relatives would be well advised to hitchhike in future, should they ever have the misfortune to find themselves visitors in Britain. And whoever now actually runs the railways in this country should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves for allowing their crisis-ridden service to become an instrument of what is beginning to resemble a police state.

LAWRENCE KUGLIN
Sittingbourne, Kent

Common sense on drug abuse

Sir: Your report on the Task Force report on drug misusers (2 May) identifies a significant boost for common sense within the Government's drugs strategy. The Department of Health is to be commended for commissioning this landmark study.

Yet with drug addiction up 13 per cent in the last year alone the effectiveness of the current balance of government resources between enforcement and control (61 per cent) and treatment, care and education (38 per cent) needs urgent reconsideration.

Common sense also includes not only investing more extensively in the drug services which are proven to save significant sums of taxpayers' money, but also a closer look at the social and economic factors underlying problem drug use. This will involve a strengthened commitment across a wider range of government departments - to include support targeted at drug users from within employment and training, housing and regeneration programmes.

ROGER HOWARD
Chief Executive
Standing Conference
on Drug Abuse
London SE1

Water company's gardening advice

Sir: Your coverage (3 May) of our advice on how to save water in the garden completely missed the point.

The one lesson which we should all have learned following the extraordinary drought of 1995 was that water is a precious resource which cannot be wasted. Severn Trent Water is delivering a £150m package of measures to ensure that we have the water to meet all of our customers' needs this summer.

We have also produced a leaflet for gardeners which offers a range of sensible advice. It includes tips on drought resistant plants, ways to improve soil and how to keep your lawn looking good. It also suggests the use of paving or gravel as an alternative to grass - not a revolutionary idea, as a look at any residential street in England will confirm.

BRIAN DUCKWORTH
Managing Director
Severn Trent Water
Birmingham



Under threat: the grey partridge, now unseen in parts of Essex. Photograph: Ardea

Birds retreat from countryside scoured by farming

Sir: After reading Nicholas Schoon's "Species put on survival red list by farmers" (18 April) and Duff Hart-Davis' "All is well when the partridge flourishes" (27 April), I write with some observations from living next to arable farmland for 15 years.

The English grey partridge has disappeared in this time - all is not well for farmland birds around here.

I have seen no evidence of the Game Conservancy's initiatives to create more sympathetic conditions on farmland for game birds and thus for other species - no attempts to reduce spray damage by leaving

a 6m strip at field edges or to make "insect banks" to supply food for chicks. Crops here are sprayed right up to the edges - indeed, these field edges receive extra herbicide at this time of year.

Set aside areas are often ploughed, harrowed, rolled or sprayed during May. This does not help ground-nesting birds. After harvest farmers "tidy-up" field edges before ploughing and re-sowing crops from September. This involves trimming ditches and banks, leveling all plant growth (not just patches of thistles) and sometimes sapling trees. What hedges remain are also cut

back, so removing any winter berries. Thus, not only are autumn-sown fields "empty larders" for birds but so are any connecting rough strips of land.

Asides of farmers seem to be that they need to make a living and therefore cannot afford to spare any land for conservation measures. This may be so. However, it remains that if these methods of treating the land are repeated farm after farm, parish after parish, which sadly seems to be the case, then bird species must continue to decline since they, like us, need a habitat.

Mrs A. M. BICKMORE
Gilston, Essex

EU 3 per cent 'limit' on budget deficit is a fallacy

Sir: Gavin Davies (29 April) is guilty of perpetuating the myth that Maastricht imposes a limit of 3 per cent on budget deficits. Three per cent is merely a reference value, such that the EU makes an evaluation of the situation of states exceeding this value in order to determine whether their deficit can be considered to be excessive.

Such an evaluation must, under the treaty, take into

account such factors as "government investment expenditure" (ie public investment is allowed even over 3 per cent) and "the medium-term economic and budgetary position" (ie counter cyclical deficits are also allowed). It requires a qualified majority (more than two-thirds of the votes) for Council to decide that a deficit is excessive.

A combination of Euro-scep-

tics (who like to portray the Maastricht convergence criteria as impossibly rigid) and fiscal conservatives (who want to reduce public deficits come what may) have led to much of the press referring to the 3 per cent as an absolute limit. It is a shame that your specialist columnist appears also to have been taken in by this fallacy.

RICHARD CORBETT
Antwerp, Belgium

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, The Independent, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL. (Fax: 0171-293 2456; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) and include a daytime telephone number.

Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

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she said: "When I realised that

tors breached the 1976 Euro-

have to amend legislation,

birth certificates and passports,

missing out

مكتبة ابن الجوزي

obituaries / gazette

Emile Habibi

The death of the eminent, controversial and highly accomplished Palestinian writer Emile Habibi could not have come at a worse moment, when anti-Israeli feeling in the Arab world is at its height following the ill-fated "grapes of wrath" military campaign. Ironically, the main feature of Habibi's narrative and drama, left its mark on his life and his death. As a writer who devoted the last 15 or so years of his life to the promotion of peace with Israel, and tirelessly campaigned for its acceptance among reluctant Arab readers and intellectuals, he died only one day after the mass funeral of the 102 Lebanese civilian victims of the Israeli massacre in Qana.

Habibi was the only Palestinian Arab to win the highest literary honours from both the PLO and Israel. Yasser Arafat bestowed on him the illustrious Al-Quds Prize, for his role in furthering the cause of Palestinian literature. In 1992, the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, awarded him the Israel Prize for his role in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding through his writing. Habibi deserved both prizes, for his winning the latter raised wide controversy both in the Arab world and in Israel. It was denounced by right-wing Israelis who were antagonistic to giving an Arab writer Israel's most prestigious literary prize. At the same time, Arab intellectuals, including the Palestinian writers in the Diaspora, castigated him for accepting a prize from a state whose hands were tainted with the blood of the Palestinian children. In the face of strong opposition and widespread criticism, Habibi accepted the prize, but donated its US\$8,000 to a charity working with the wounded child victims of the intifada.

Habibi was born in Haifa in 1922 to a Christian Orthodox middle-class family. After obtaining his baccalaureate in 1939, he worked in Haifa's oil

refinery while studying by correspondence for a London University degree in petroleum engineering. In 1942 he abandoned his study to work as a news announcer for the Palestinian broadcasting station in Jerusalem.

From the outset of his public career, Habibi was a lone voice calling, in 1949, for the acceptance of the UN plan for the division of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, a plan that was unanimously rejected by all Arab governments. Soon after the creation of Israel, he became a political activist for the cause of Palestinians and the founder and leader of the League of Liberation of Palestine, which eventually became the Israeli Communist Party, Rakah. For a long time, Rakah was the only political party in Israel with a mixed membership of Arabs and Jews.

In 1952, Habibi, by far the most active Arab member in Rakah, was elected to the Knesset, a seat he held for 20 years. As a parliamentary politician, he devoted his energy to the political struggle of the Palestinian people who stayed behind after the creation of the state of Israel on their land. He defended their legal, political and human rights, and above all devoted most of his active life to the articulation of their cause.

In the 1950s, he became the chief editor of Rakah's Arabic language newspaper, *al-Ihtidat* ("The Union"), which called for the unity of Arabs and Jews in a secular, democratic, multi-ethnic state in Palestine. Under his editorship, it promoted the cause of the Palestinian Arabs and encouraged them to express their identity and maintain their cultural tradition. It was in *al-Ihtidat* and its literary monthly supplement, *al-Jadid*, that the new Palestinian poetry of resistance emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, articulating a strong sense of hope and the quest for an Arab identity among Palestinians in Israel.



Habibi: a major force in the development of the Arabic novel

Photograph: Reuters

Unlike most Palestinian writers, Emile Habibi started writing late in life. He began almost as a challenge to a statement made, after the Arab defeat of 1967, by the late Yigal Allon, a leading Israeli politician, who told him that the Palestinians did not exist any longer, for if they did they would have produced their own literature. Literature was seen as a proof of existence and a document of national identity. Habibi was then in his mid-forties and the denial of the existence of Palestinians, common at the time in Zionist circles, prompted him to document their survival.

Unlike the majority of contemporary Palestinian writers

who emerged from the refugee camps and thus had little or no experience of Palestine before the establishment of the Jewish state, Habibi had spent his childhood in the Palestine of the British Mandate, and remained in his native city after the creation of Israel, thus sustaining the continuity of the Palestinian experience. This provided him with the unique position of representing the continuity of the Palestinian experience in modern Arabic literature.

The devastating shock of the 1967 war turned Habibi's left-wing optimism into bitter sarcasm and biting humour which he channelled into his first literary work, *Sudasyayr al-Ayyam*

(*"The Sextet of the Six Day War"*, 1968). In this work, Habibi rejects the outcome of the war and posits an alternative to the official account, using narrative as a means of subverting the prevalent order and warding off the nightmare of reality. The Sextet is a unique work of narrative using the form of the short-story cycle to present a panoramic view of the contradictions of the war and its ironic impact on the Palestinians. Each piece is structurally autonomous and can be read as an independent story, but the subtle link between the pieces offers the work its unity, internal cohesion and dynamism. Unlike most short-story cycles

which are linked through a character, a place or an event, the link generating the structural unity of the Sextet is that of identity, impact, shock and irony. The Palestinian dream of "return" is accomplished, but only ironically when the rest of the Palestinian land falls under Israeli occupation.

Structural irony is also at the core of his second and most famous novel, *Al-Waqi' al-Gharabi fi Ikhafa 'Sa'id Abi-Nahs al-Mutashil* (known in English under its short title, *The Pess-Optimist*, 1974). In this novel, which was translated into 16 languages, the theme of the immediate shock of the 1967 war recedes into the back-

ground and the survival of Palestinians in the face of Zionist attempts to eradicate their identity comes to the fore. *The Pess-Optimist* uses a fine mixture of Sterne's ironic and reflexive narrative in *Tristram Shandy* and the humorous Arabic anecdotal narrative in telling the story of the Palestinians of Habibi's generation. It consists of three parts, each devoted to a major phase in the recent history of Palestine and entitled with the name of a woman who is both the beloved of the hero and a symbol of Palestine. The first, "Yu'ad", represents the early period before the loss of Palestine in 1948; the second, "Baqiyah", embodies the spiritual of the Palestinian resistance to the eradication of their national identity after the creation of the state of Israel; and the third, "Yu'ad al-Thaniyah", signifies the new stage of the Palestinian consciousness which emerged after 1967 and the armed Palestinian resistance.

The inevitability of resistance is the main theme of the novel, which articulates the impossibility of collaboration, for no matter how subservient and accepting the Palestinian becomes the only fate for him in Israel is oppression and annihilation. Resistance is used in the novel in its widest sense; it is not confined to overt acts of defiance, for every measure that preserves the Palestinian presence, identity and culture is an act of resistance, even if it appears as a form of submission and capitulation. In this respect the novel foreshadowed the Palestinian *intifada* long before it took place.

Unlike most novels, *The Pess-Optimist* is full of footnotes creating a secondary text which serves as the cultural context of the novel and roots every aspect of the narrative in the historical and geographical reality of Palestine. The detailed information provided in these notes generates an elaborate internal memory which serve as a

counter-argument against any denial of the existence of Palestine and its identity.

The consolidation of this identity and the preservation of its cultural and oral history seems to be at the heart of Habibi's literary project. It permeates his plays, *Luka' Ibn Luka'* ("Luka the son of Luka", 1979) and *Umm al-Rubabika* ("The Pedlar Woman", 1982), and novels, *Al-Hayyah* (1985) and *Saraya Bint al-Chad* ("Saraya the Ogre's Daughter", 1992). In these two novels the textual space becomes an arena for the inscription of what one may call the infrastructure of Palestinian identity: its history, geography, oral tradition, folk culture, popular lore concerning agriculture and weather, anecdotes, proverbs and even fragments of its written literature. The collective culture is inscribed as much in the realistic account of daily events as in the flight into fantasy and imagination. Beneath the deformed narrative space of present-day Israel the author invokes through a powerful nostalgia the sacred and Palestine around every corner and behind every street-name.

The writing of Habibi never failed to generate interest and controversy both in the Arab world and among Palestinians and Israelis alike. He was one of the major forces in the development of the Arabic novel and provided it with some of its most interesting experimental work. The strength of controversy raised by his work and political views throughout his career and the heated discussion it generated is a testimony to Habibi's lasting importance as a prominent literary figure and a symbol of Palestinian identity. Through these debates he succeeded in putting the Palestinian question firmly on the literary agenda.

Sabry Hafez

Emile Habibi, writer born Haifa 29 August 1922; married (two sons); died Nazareth 2 May 1996.

Mike Leander

Mike Leander stamped his distinctive arrangement and production style on British popular music in the Sixties, his influence continuing through the Seventies with the creation of the glam rock star Gary Glitter, and into the Eighties as the writer of the West End musical *Matador*.

Mike Leander was born Michael Farr in 1941 in Walthamstow, east London. He won a scholarship to Bancroft's school in Woodford Green, Essex, where he boarded from 1952 until 1959. His consuming interests were cricket, at which he represented the school at all levels, and music of all kinds. At school he regularly attended Sunday classical music evenings in the library, which met with the approval of his housemaster, and formed a skittle group, which didn't.

He studied law, more to appease his elders than through any innate desire, but the lure of the music business was too strong and, after less than a year, he gave it up and found a job as office junior in a small music publishing company. He had soon discovered a singer and written some songs and, re-

alising the financial potential in leasing finished recordings to record companies, persuaded them to finance the making of such a recording. Leander arranged and produced the record which was duly leased to Decca Records, sadly for no advance and a rather lower royalty rate than had been expected. It flopped but, as a result, Decca offered Leander a contract as an arranger; not bad for someone who, at that time, was still teaching himself to read and write music.

His foot was on the first rung of a ladder, to the top of which he climbed in record time. An intelligent deep thinker, he knew what he wanted and how to make it happen. He found time to study orchestration at the Trinity College of Music and, with his unshakable belief in his own ability, created a classical-pop style of arranging in the early Sixties which quickly established him as a major influence on the popular music of the time. In the early Sixties he arranged and in many cases produced records by the Rolling Stones, Cliff Richard, Billy Fury, Marianne Faithfull, Marc

Bolan, the Small Faces, Joe Cocker, Van Morrison, Alan Price, Shirley Bassey, Lulu, Jimmy Page, Roy Orbison and Gene Pitney.

His influence on British popular music did not go unnoticed in America, and in 1964 Atlantic Records brought him to the United States to work with the legendary Ben E. King and the Drifters, where he had an immediate No 1 in the *Billboard* chart with "Under the Boardwalk". During a period in which he also wrote "Lady Godiva" for Peter and Gordon and "I've Been a Bad Bad Boy" and "High Time" for Paul Jones, the arrangement he was most proud of was for "She's Leaving Home" on the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album in 1967.

Stylish and charismatic, a commanding and respected figure in and out of the recording studio, he was not only a leading contributor to the music of the Sixties he was a leading light on the swinging social scene. He was a celebrity and loved to celebrate. Whether a record reached No 1 or No 31 it was still worth a table for 12 at the Aréthusa, and the fact that in some cases the restaurant bill

would exceed the aggregate of royalties to come was of little concern to Leander.

In the latter part of the Sixties, he signed a six-figure contract with MCA Records as a writer and producer. He produced and arranged his for several MCA artists; recorded an album, *Migration*, with the Mike Leander Orchestra; was executive producer of the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice concept album *Jesus Christ Superstar*; producer of the soundtrack album of *Godspell* and an album of Rupert Brooke poems read by Sir John Gielgud; and composed the music for several films, including *Privilege* and *Run a Crooked Mile*. In the early Seventies his writing partnership with me (we were old schoolfriends) produced worldwide hits for Engelbert Humperdinck, Cliff Richard and Vanity Fair, whose song "Early in the Morning" received a BMI award for exceeding one million broadcast performances in the United States.

In 1972 Leander's love of rock'n'roll music and his belief in the stagecraft of a hitmaker unsuccessful rocker, Paul Gadd,

led to his instigation of the glam rock movement when he created the music and persona of Gary Glitter. Apart from writing, arranging and producing 11 consecutive Top Ten hits for Gary, including three Number Ones, Leander played all the instruments on the records except the brass. The unique drum and guitar sounds on these records were the envy of many subsequent imitators, none of whom could quite achieve the distinctive quality of Leander's originals. Another 10 hits followed, featuring either Gary or the Glitter Band, and Leander received an Ivor Novello Award and a Certificate of Honour for Services to British Popular Music.

From the late Seventies Leander shared his time between London and Mallorca. He had a great love of Spain and all things Spanish and in conceived the idea for a musical based on the bullfightier El Cordobes, called *Matador*, which we started writing in 1983. He produced a concept album of the show in 1987 which included the hit single "A Boy From Nowhere" by Tom Jones. Acclaimed productions of the show followed in



Leander, left, at his wedding to Penelope Carter in 1974. Gary Glitter, right, was best man

Chicago and Miami in 1989/90 and a long time ambition of Leander's was fulfilled in 1991 when *Matador* opened at the Queen's Theatre in the West End of London. It ran for four months, winning a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Choreography. Plans are in place for further productions in four theatres in America in 1997.

Outside music, Mike Leander's great passion was cricket.

In his later, lazier days, he considered carrying his bat for 19 to be most satisfactory, despite perhaps running out three or four members of his team in the process. He was a proud member of the MCC and loved nothing more than watching a test match from the balcony of the Pavilion Bar.

Mike Leander was not only hugely talented but generous with that talent. He made an

enormous contribution to the world of music and was a great influence on the lives of many people inside and outside the music business.

Edward Seago

Michael Farr (Mike Leander), songwriter, record producer, arranger; born London 30 June 1941; married 1974 Penny Carter (two sons); died London 18 April 1996.

Births, Marriages & Deaths

DEATHS

GRILLERS: On 26 April, Honor Elizabeth, beloved mother of Catherine Fraser and Arnold Giller, funeral service at Mortlake Crematorium on Friday 10 May at 1.15pm. Flowers to Lifford, 44 Mortlake Road, London W8, telephone 0171-937-0757.

IN MEMORIAM

BORTHWICK: Florence Borthwick (née Cronin), died 4 May 1993. No flower, no words.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 0171-293 2911 (24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2912) or faxed to 0171-293 2910, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements (notices, funerals, Birthdays, Marriages, Deaths) must be submitted in writing (or typed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. They should be accompanied by a daytime telephone number.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

Princess Michael of Kent tomorrow presents the prizes at the Bodmin Horse Trials.

Changing of the Guard

TODAY: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am: 1st Battalion Irish Guards mounts the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am. Band provided by the Scots Guards.

TOMORROW: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 10am: 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards mounts the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am. Band provided by the Welsh Guards.

Marriages

Mr L. W. L. Thomas and Mrs E. Cottrell
The marriage took place on Friday 3 May, at Braemar and afterwards Courtenay, between Hugh Thomas and Elisabeth Cottrell.

Birthdays

TODAY: Mr Frith Banbury, theatrical director, 84; The Rev Professor Charles Barrett, theologian, 79; Mr Michael Barrymore, entertainer, 44; Mr John Birt, BBC chairman, 58; Mr Barry Reed, chairman, Austin Reed Group, 65; Mr Roger Rees, actor and playwright, 52; Mr James Stevens, composer, 66; Miss Doreen Walling, actress, 50; Mr Jonathan Williams, managing director, Woolworth, 58; The Right Rev Gordon Wheeler, Roman Catholic Bishop Emeritus of Leeds, 86; Mr John Whitaker, cricketer, 34; Professor Sir Glanville Williams, former Chairman, Ancient Monuments Board (Wales), 76; Miss Eileen Wynne, singer, 54; Mr Gerard Young, former Lord-Lieutenant of South Yorks, 86.

Anniversaries

TODAY: Births: Sir Thomas Lawrence, portrait painter, 1769; William Hacking Prescott, historian, 1796; Joseph Whitaker, publisher of *Whitaker's Almanack*, 1820; Thomas Henry Huxley, biologist and naturalist, 1825; John Hanning Speke, discoverer of the source of the Nile, 1827; Alice Liddell, the original of *Alice in Wonderland*, 1852; Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst, artist and feminist, 1882; Israel Moses Steiff, Baron Steiff, president of Marks and Spencer, 1889; Sir Archibald Hector McIndoe, plastic surgeon, 1900; Audrey Hepburn, actress, 1929; Deaths: Sir Francis Osbert Saverell Sitwell, 81, author, 1969; Joseph Broz Tito, president of Yugoslavia, 1980; Diana Dors (Fluck), actress, 1984. On this day: the Lancastrians were defeated by the Yorkists at the Battle of Tewkesbury, 1471; the first Derby was run at Epsom (and won by Diomed), 1789; the Cunard shipping line was founded, 1839; Nabal was proclaimed a British colony, 1843; the Moors rebelled against the British in New

Zealand, 1863; the Daily Mail was first published, price one halfpenny, 1866; work on excavating the Panama Canal began, 1904; the General Strike in Britain began, 1926; "Waltzing Matilda" became the national anthem of Australia, 1926; Mrs Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first woman Prime Minister, 1979; Today is the Feast Day of St Augustine Webster, St Cyriacus or Jude Quiriacus, St Florian of Lorch, St Gothard or Godehard, St John Houghton, St Pelagia of Tarsus, St Robert Lawrence, St Richard Reynolds and St Venenius of Milan.

TOMORROW: Births: Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, philosopher, 1813; Heinrich Karl Marx, author and socialist, 1818; Henryk Sienkiewicz, novelist, author of *Quo Vadis?*, 1846; Archibald Percival Wavell, first Earl Wavell, soldier, 1883; Christopher Darlington Morley, novelist and playwright, 1889; Sir Gordon Richards, jockey, 1904. Deaths: Napoleon I (Napoleone Buonaparte), Emperor of France, 1821; Beatrix Harraden, novelist, 1936; James Branch Cabell, novelist, 1958. On this day: excavation of the Corinth Canal in Greece began, 1882; Amy Johnson began a solo flight to Australia, 1930; the Council of Europe was set up in London, 1949; Major Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet cosmonaut, orbited the earth, 1961. Today is the Feast Day of St Angela, St Averutus, St Hilary of Arles, St Hilary of Galeata, St John Halle, St Jutta and St Maurinus.

Lectures

TODAY

National Gallery: Julia Tizer, "May Flowers (I): Redon, *Ophelia Among the Flowers*", 12pm.

National Portrait Gallery: Alfred Bradley and Susan Morris, "Catherine Massey, historian", 3pm.

TOMORROW

Tate Gallery: Laurence Bradbury, "Naum Gabo: spatial sculpture", 2.30pm.

'T' is a tyrant. You are what you eat

faith & reason

Peter Mullen is in no mood to celebrate the quatercentenary of the birth of René Descartes. Descartes was absurd and wrong, he argues; our identity has its origin in objective values.

In this form, Cartesian subjectivism was consolidated by Rousseau and the Romantic Movements. Its religious expression was found in such as Wesley whose criterion for redemption was to have one's individual heart "strangely warmed" - an ominous pre-echo of the nauseating consumerist revivalism of our own times which advertises Jesus Christ as my personal saviour, as if the dynamics of the forgiveness of sins were the business of insurance companies.

The "I" in "I think therefore I am" is a tyrant. This romantic individual is not only the demonic artist of 19th-century concert platforms and countless embarrassing Hollywood movies about artistic genius: he is also the supposedly omniscient personality inside each one of us.

Descartes' faulty epistemology lies behind the moral relativism which plagues modern societies and renders impotent all efforts at ethical consensus. It is not even as though Descartes had delivered to us an up-to-date truth - that the individual personality is sovereign and we must somehow learn as a society to cope with this fact. For the individual constructed on Descartes' model and subsequently

elaborated to ever more sickening effect is, as Wittgenstein pointed out, a logical and a grammatical fiction.

There is another slogan, one that may be trusted: you are what you eat. But we have failed to understand that this truth applies not only to the body but to the mind and morals. The subjectivist view that everyone's opinion is equally valid leads to the relativism which claims that the Sex Pistols are as good as Bach. This is a judgement which could only be made by one who had imbibed the culture of the Sex Pistols but not the culture of Bach.

Once the individual has been accepted as an indivisible, unchallengeable whole, set apart from everything else in the world, we lose the ability to judge between individual preferences. We must rediscover the pre-Cartesian knowledge that tradition preserves objective beliefs which are more certain than our poor subjectivities. It is futile to say that everyone has a right to their own opinions, as if this means that all opinions, however uneducated and ill-considered, are equally likely to express the truth.

We are what we eat. We form our judgements out of the stuff of which we are constituted. If therefore a child is filled up with the moral and aesthetic equivalent of junk food then we must expect him to develop a junk mind. The most appropriate way to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Descartes is to begin again his quest for understanding but to begin with the realisation that our identity is not something to be deduced absurdly from our own thoughts. The "I" is not something conjectured into existence: it is given and created out of whole worlds of objective values. And it is the choices of values which is crucial. As Ezra Pound said, "Show me what you value and I'll tell you what you're worth."

she said. "When I realised that

they breached the 1976 Euro-

have to amend legislation,

birth certificates and passports."

missioning troops

مكتبة الناصر



Royal and Sun seal £6bn merger

Insurance shares race ahead on speculation of wave of takeovers in the industry

PETER RODGERS
and NIC CUCITTI

Insurance shares raced ahead yesterday as the City predicted a wave of takeovers in the industry, prompted by the surprise £6bn merger of Royal Insurance and Sun Alliance.

Analysts said the merger raised doubts about the long-term independence of Guardian Royal Exchange, the smallest composite left in the sector.

There was speculation that GRE could be a target for European insurers, including the Dutch company, Fortis, the French insurer, Axa, and Generali, the Italian firm.

One analyst said: "This definitely puts pressure on GRE. I would not be surprised at an announcement from them in the near future, either in relation to a merger with Commercial Union or General Accident, or a takeover from another source."

GRE shares rose 38p to 271p. General Accident was up 25p to 647p and Commercial Union, until the new deal Britain's largest general insurer, rose 25p to 615p. At those prices GRE is worth £2.5bn, Commercial Union £4.1bn, and General Accident £3.1bn.

The consultancy Datamonitor forecast that nearly a third of general insurers would fall victim to mergers or acquisitions and a similar contraction has already been widely predicted in the life insurance industry.

The merger now makes Prudential the not favourite to take over Friends Provident, in the wave of consolidation sweeping through the life insurance industry.

The life mutual with £15bn under management was until recently thought to have been closely stalked by Sun Alliance. The merged Royal Sun Alliance is expected to renew its search for a mutual to buy after its own deal goes through in August, because the combined weight of the two companies' life operations is much lower than their share of the general insurance market.

Arthur Hayes of Sun Alliance, who is to be an executive director of the merged group, said "maybe at some time in the future we will return to looking at mutuals".

On the life insurance side, the combined company will only be sixth in annualised premium income.

With the merger costing 5,000 jobs, most of them in the UK, over the next two years, the two companies said they expected cost savings of £175m a year by 1998, to set against one-off costs of the restructuring of the same amount - giving a one-year payback. The companies have 28,000 staff in the UK, 22,000 of them in mainstream insurance which will reduce to 17,000 to 18,000, and their world-wide total is 45,000.

The combined company will be the UK's largest general insurer and will also be the ninth largest composite insurer in the world - leaping from 23rd place for Royal and 25th for Sun Alliance.

The all share deal was generally welcomed in the City, because there has been a widespread recognition that the UK insurance market has too few large international players. The overlap between the two in

overseas markets is also small. Both have plans to expand in India and China.

The merged group had worldwide premium income of £9.4bn and net profits of £1,026bn last year on pro forma accounts.

After their shares leapt yesterday - Royal by 67p to 437p and Sun Alliance by 55p to 414p - the total market value was £6.1bn, of which £2.8bn was Royal and £3.3bn was Sun Alliance. Total assets are £55bn including £45bn of funds under management.

Under the terms of the merger, holders of 1,000 Royal shares will own 1,067 Royal Sun Alliance shares, while 1,000 Sun Alliance shares translate into the same number in the new company. Royal shareholders will then own 46.4 per cent and Sun Alliance 53.6 per cent of the combine. However, unlike takeovers or mergers of mutual societies there will be no cash bonanza for policyholders.

Roger Taylor, the chief executive of Sun Alliance who as deputy chairman is to be the top executive director in the merged group, said he did not believe the merger would be put on ice by a UK monopolies inquiry. He conceded there was a possible problem in one specialised type of engineering insurance where the combined share is 45 per cent. This is the business of insuring and inspecting boilers.

But he said that while the combined share of household insurance approaches 25 per cent, this only included members of the Association of British Insurers, and when other competitors were taken into account the share would be 20 per cent.

Mr Taylor acknowledged the merger came within the orbit of the European authorities, which would examine the competition implications.

The new "super-insurer", Royal Sun Alliance, whose name has to be cleared with the Home Office because of the use of the word Royal - will be twice the size of the next two largest composite insurers General Accident and Commercial Union.

Both have a UK market share of about 7 per cent. GRE is in fourth place with about five per cent.

Stephen Dias, insurance analyst at Goldman Sachs, said: "From the numbers, it is a good deal for both sets of shareholders. It is well balanced. It is quite clear that some advantage could be gained from the difficult UK marketplace."

Comment, page 19



Double-act: Richard Gamble, new group chief executive (left), and Roger Taylor, deputy chairman Photograph: Colin McKillop

A powerful overlap at the top

PETER RODGERS
and JOHN WILLCOCK

Jockeying for power at the top of the merged company has left both the chief executives of Royal and Sun Alliance in apparently overlapping jobs.

Richard Gamble of Royal will be group chief executive but Roger Taylor of Sun Alliance will have the senior role as executive deputy chairman and chairman of the management board.

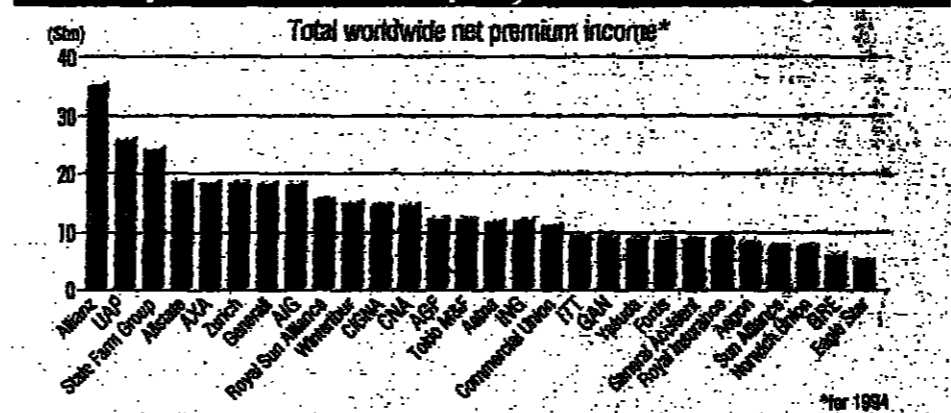
The arrangement is part of a carefully balanced reorganisation that sees the departure of one Royal director, Roy Elms, and one from Sun Alliance, Ian Trotter, both of whom will be consultants to the company.

There are bound to be questions over whether the emergence of the two most powerful figures in both companies in similar positions at the top of the new organisation can be a lasting arrangement.

Mr Gamble, 56, will have overall operational responsibility for the group, running the management team, and will report directly to Mr Taylor, 54. Mr Taylor will be responsible for the world-wide strategy of the merged business.

Asked to define the two top

Royal Sun Alliance leaps to ninth in world league



executive roles, Mr Taylor said: "The board has delegated executive responsibility to me."

Above both men will be a new non-executive chairman, to replace Sir Christopher Benson, the chairman of Sun Alliance, who will remain as interim chairman of the merged group until the new person arrives.

An acquaintance described Mr Taylor yesterday as a "man through and through." Mr Taylor joined what was then the Alliance straight from school, in the West Midlands. He has stayed

with the company ever since, and was the driving force behind its last big acquisition. In 1984 it bought another insurance company Phoenix for £400m, and achieved 18 per cent cost savings in as many months.

Richard Gamble, by contrast, trained as an accountant and has had a varied career, including since 1976 the finance director's role at Northern Telecom, McDonnell Douglas UK and British Airways. Mr Gamble joined Royal from BA in 1989 as group finance director, and was seen as a good outside fig-

ure to pull together what was regarded as a somewhat sleepy company with severe problems in the US.

The new group will have four executive directors - Mr Taylor, Mr Gamble, Arthur Hayes from Sun Alliance and Paul Spencer as group finance director from Royal.

The non-executive directors have been carefully chosen with equal balance from both original boards and include the Duke of Westminster from Sun Alliance. A number are also quitting.

Tunnel banks to propose debt swap

PETER RODGERS
Business Editor

Banks negotiating with Euro-tunnel over an £8.1bn debt reconstruction are expected next week to propose an immediate swap of part of the debt for 49 per cent of the equity in the company.

Reports from Paris last night said the four lead banks, including NatWest and Midland, are to start talks with Euro-tunnel next week on the plan.

A proposal from the banks to take just under half the equity in the company is less tough than some shareholders had feared, against a background of cash surpluses that are a fraction of the interest bill.

Eurolateral sources indicated that no proposal had yet been made to the company, and it is not clear whether it would accept a 49 per cent swap.

There had been suggestions that the banks would insist on taking anything up to 90 per cent of the company from shareholders in return for agreement to restructure the debt, on which interest payments were suspended last September.

The Paris sources said the debt restructuring agreement was reached last Sunday among National Westminster Bank, the HSBC Holdings subsidiary Midland Bank, Banque Nationale de Paris, Credit Lyonnais, the European Investment Bank and the European Coal and Steel Community.

The lead banks are believed to have already won agreement on their proposals from the larger group of 25 instructing banks overseeing the financial reconstruction talks, which are due to begin next week.

But they now have to enter detailed negotiations with Euro-tunnel, the company co-chaired by Sir Alastair Morton and Patrick Ponsolle.

Eurolateral has drawn up its own proposals, thought to envisage a limited debt-for-equity swap combined with a flexible plan to share the growing revenue from the tunnel between bank creditors and shareholders over the years ahead.

Assuming agreement is reached with the Euro-tunnel board, the banks will then have to sell the deal to the rest of the 225-strong banking syndicate that have lent the £8.1bn of junior debt in question. The syndicate have to deliver a 100 per cent vote in favour of the restructuring proposals.

The balance of the £9bn debt is held by senior lenders whose interest payments are not part of the 18 month standstill announced last September.

Inquiry starts into OFT gaffe over Colorvision

PATRICK TOOHER

Embarrassment engulfed the Office of Fair Trading yesterday as the Stock Exchange launched an inquiry into why the wrong statement was issued to investors about the status of an OFT inquiry into Colorvision, the Liverpool-based electrical retailer.

"It's a bit of a balls-up to say the least," an OFT spokesman admitted. "Something went horribly wrong."

The OFT had meant to say Colorvision's appeal against revoked consumer credit licences would go uncontested if a proposed boardroom shake-up, including the appointment of the former Wembley Stadium boss Sir Brian Wolfson as executive chairman, was implemented.

Instead, the OFT sent out a January press release, stating Colorvision had been stripped of the licences and slammed the company's business practices, which included misleading prices, dishonestly supplying secondhand or ex-display goods and failing to offer refunds when consumers were entitled to them.

It took the OFT almost half an hour to rectify its mistake, by which time Colorvision's shares had slumped to an all-time low of 10p. They soared to 41p when the real OFT position became clear and ended the day up 6p at 32p.

As part of the restructuring, chairman Neville Michaelson and non-executive director Bernard Michaelson have retired. Sir Brian will be joined on

the revamped board by Adrian Collins, former chief executive of fund manager Gartmore, and Anthony Rawlinson of venture capital group Strand Partners.

The Michaelsons have also transferred, for no payment, a 29.9 per cent stake in the company worth just under £2m to Sir Brian, Mr Collins and Strand Partners.

A further 6.8 per cent stake will be placed in a discretionary trust for the benefit of the company's key employees, leaving Neville and Bernard Michaelson with 29.9 per cent of Colorvision's equity.

Colorvision said the changes were being carried out at its own suggestion. The final decision over its consumer credit licences rests with Ian Lang, the Trade and Industry Secretary.

MICHAEL HARRISON

Midlands Electricity is expected to agree to a takeover next week from two US utilities valuing the business at £1.5bn to £2bn and setting the scene for a fresh round of bid fever in the power industry.

The company confirmed yesterday that it was in discussions that could lead to an offer. One of the bidders is the New Jersey-based General Public Utilities. The other is rumoured to be Houston Industries of Texas, which bid unsuccessfully for Norweb last year.

The market has been expecting a bid since the Trade and Industry Secretary Ian Lang takeover an agreed £1.95bn takeover of Midlands by the generator PowerGen 10 days ago.

US utilities to bid for Midlands Electricity

Within 48 hours the Midlands chairman Bryan Townsend had received a number of informal approaches from US utilities.

Other possible US suitors being mentioned yesterday included Pacificorp, Mission Energy, Duke Power and Florida Power and Light. There were also rumours of a possible counter bid by the water company Severn Trent.

Although Mr Lang has effectively blocked bids both by and for the two generators, National Power and PowerGen, the remaining independent regional electricity companies are all thought vulnerable to takeover.

General Public Utilities is capitalised at \$3.8bn (£2.5bn) and owns three utility companies on the US eastern-

seaboard - Jersey Central Power and Light, Metropolitan Edison and Pennsylvania Electric. It has a turnover of just under \$4bn and 10,000 employees.

Houston Industries is valued at \$5.5bn and generates and supplies electricity to more than 1.5 million customers on the Gulf coast of Texas, making it the ninth largest electricity utility in the US. It also has international operations in Argentina and India.

Analysts speculated yesterday that a bid could value Midlands at up to £50p a share or more compared with its opening price yesterday of 38p. The shares closed 38p higher at 42p valuing the company at £1.6bn.

PowerGen's attitude could be crucial to the outcome since it is sitting on a 21 per cent stake.

DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS REVISED INTEREST RATES

EFFECTIVE FROM 4 MAY 1996

Amount you invest	% Gross	% Gross CAR*	% Net*	% Net CAR*
GREAT NORTH POSTAL DEPOSIT ACCOUNT*				
Rates unchanged				
£100,000 or more	7.00	-	5.60	-
£50,000 - £99,999	6.75	-	5.40	-
£25,000 - £49,999	6.50	-	5.20	-
£10,000 - £24,999	6.25	-	5.00	-
£5,000 - £9,999	6.00	-	4.80	-
£1,000 - £4,999	5.75	-	4.60	-
DEPOSIT 120 DAY ACCOUNT*				
(Annual Interest)				
£50,000 or more	5.15	-	4.12	-
£25,000 - £49,999	4.15	-	3.12	-
£10,000 - £24,999	3.55	-	2.84	-
£5,000 - £9,999	3.35	-	2.68	-
£1,000 - £4,999	3.20	-	2.40	-
DEPOSIT INSTANT ACCESS ACCOUNT*				
(Annual Interest)				
£40,000 or more	3.15	-	1.72	-
£25,000 - £39,999	1.95	-	1.16	-
£10,000 - £24,999	1.65	-	0.80	-
£5,000 - £9,999	1.65	-	0.80	-
£1,000 - £4,999	0.60	-	0.48	-
£500 - £999	0.50	-	0.40	-
£50 - £499	0.50	-	0.40	-
DEPOSIT CURRENT ACCOUNT*				
(Annual Interest)				
£50,000 or more	2.42	2.45	1.94	1.95
£25,000 - £49,999	1.42	1.45	1.15	1.16
£10,000 - £24,999	0.80	0.80	0.64	0.64
£5,000 - £9,999	0.60	0.60	0.48	0.48
£1,000 - £4,999	0.55	0.55	0.44	0.44
£500 - £999	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.40
£50 - £499	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.40
DEPOSIT TESSA II*				
£9,000	7.50	-	-	-
£3,001 - £8,999	7.00	-	-	-
DEPOSIT CHARITY ACCOUNT				
£1 or more	5.75	-	-	-

A deposit account does not grant you membership rights in the Society.
 1. Compound Annual Rate is the annual return on your savings if monthly interest payments are retained in the account.
 2. Interest will be paid after deduction of income tax at the lower rate of 20% or, subject to the required certificates, gross. Where the tax deducted exceeds an investor's tax liability (if any), a claim may be made to the Inland Revenue for repayment of tax. For individuals whose income falls within the lower or basic rate bands, the tax deducted will match their liability as far as the interest and they will have no net tax to pay on it. Individuals who are liable at the higher rate of income tax at 40% will have to pay additional tax on the interest to cover the difference between the tax deducted and the higher rate tax due.
 3. Rates include a bonus of 0.50% gross per month if you make no withdrawals in each specified 12 month period. Full details on request.
 4. Tax has provided no withdrawal of capital or made during the five year term and the terms and conditions are complied with.
 5. Interest is not paid on balances below £50, unless the account holder is registered as being under 25 years of age. (Please contact your local branch for full details).
 6. Deposit Current Account minimum opening balance £200.
 7. The Northern Rock Building Society is a member of the Building Societies Association. Protection scheme established under the Building Societies Act 1986. Payments under the Scheme are limited to 90% of an investor's total deposits and are deposits subject to a maximum payment to any one investor of £100,000 (or £200,000 if protected). Most shares and deposits are guaranteed by the Building Society within the European Economic Area are covered. Further details are available on request from the Society.

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Northern Rock Building Society Principal Office:
 Northern Rock House, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4PL.

STOCK MARKETS					
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1995/96 High	1995/96 Low
FTSE 100	3751.60	-24.80	-0.7	3857.10	3639.50
FTSE 250	4515.30	-22.40	-0.5	4588.60	4015.30
FTSE 350	1902.20	-11.00	-0.6	1945.40	1816.80
FT Small Cap	2224.05	-8.34	-0.4	2232.39	1954.06
FT All Share	1887.22	-11.41	-0.6	1924.17	1791.85
New York	5515.61	+17.34	+0.3	5589.74	3832.08
Tokyo	21662.38	Closed	-	22282.05	19734.70
Hong Kong	10734.24	-185.66	-1.8	11594.98	10073.39
Frankfurt	2457.49	-44.82	-1.8	2538.26	2253.86

Sources: FT Information

INTEREST RATES					
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1995/96 High	1995/96 Low
Short sterling*	5.00	6.38	8.24	8.28	8.34
UK medium gilt	5.50	6.06	6.83	8.70	7.05
US long bond	0.53	1.08	Closed	Closed	Closed
Germany	3.22	3.28	6.57	6.98	7.28

CURRENCIES					
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1995/96 High	1995/96 Low
\$/£	1.5025	+0.31c	1.6009	1.5273	1.4711
DM/£	1.5040	+0.30c	1.5980	1.5273	1.4711
DM/£	1.5040	+0.30c	1.5980	1.5273	1.4711
DM/£	1.5040	+0.30c	1.5980	1.5273	1.4711
DM/£	1.5040	+0.30c	1.5980	1.5273	1.4711

OTHER INDICATORS					
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1995/96 High	1995/96 Low
Oil Brent \$	18.99	+0.2	19.01	151.5	147.5
Gold \$	393.20	+0.00	393.20	107.4	105.3
Gold £	261.70	-0.54	243.11	Base Rates	6.00pc

Before 15.17hrs the average of the two rates of £12.50. Prices of the unit of 100p.

she said. "When I realised that... have to amend legislation... birth certificates and passports... missioning..."

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One of the last bastions of inefficiency falls



COMMENT

'Insurers tend to regard themselves as professionals with policyholders, rather than commercial businesses with customers, and until the last few years the great British public has rather allowed them to get away with it'

We obviously spoke a touch too soon when we said in Business Comment yesterday that the breakdown of talks between British Telecom and Cable & Wireless could herald the end of the merger boom. There is, of course, one sector that cries out for consolidation and rationalisation - composite insurance. The only real surprise is that it has taken so long for the insurers to strike a significant deal.

Insurance remains one of the last great bastions of inefficiency, arrogance and outdated practice. Insurers tend to regard themselves as professionals with policyholders, rather than commercial businesses with customers, and until the last few years the great British public has rather allowed them to get away with it. The result is overmanning, Spanish practices and a positively 19th-century attitude to organisation and technology.

Things are changing, however. Insurers are being forced to wake up to what most of us realised long ago: these days the world doesn't come to you. If you want to compete, you have to go out to the world.

The advance of low-cost telephone insurance and the giant insurers of America and Europe is badly rattling our own molly-coddled industry. Competition is becoming intense and prices are tumbling. As in any price war, costs have to tumble too. It is a sad truth that, although this merger creates Britain's largest insurance company, Royal Sun Alliance will still rank no higher than ninth in the world league.

Nor, apparently, are the powerful egos, strong dynastic tendencies, and differing City allegiances of this industry the barrier to change they once were. Individual insurance companies have traditionally retained strong links with particular banking dynasties - Barclays, Rothschild, Hambros. As with so much of the "old" City, these divisions are being swept away. Both Robert Taylor and Richard Gamble, respectively chief executives of Sun Alliance and Royal Insurance, found the logic of this merger inescapable. A way of accommodating two fiercely independent management teams under one roof had to be found.

As it is the solution proposed, with the top jobs shared out between the two boards and the position of chief executive in effect split, is probably untenable long-term. One will eventually come to dominate the other. But there is no doubting the sense of the merger. Royal Sun Alliance will be uniquely placed to deal with the growing competitive pressures of the domestic and international market. Others will surely be forced to follow.

Mindscape displays Pearson's deep problem

"I wasn't managed as effectively as it might have been. We are going to narrow the focus of the business and concentrate on those areas where we have a strong position in the market." So said John Makin-

son, Pearson's finance director, and, while he was only talking about Mindscape, the fast-expanding Californian black hole on which Pearson squandered £300m two years ago, his words might apply to the whole empire.

Mindscape has been an unmitigated disaster and Pearson has been at best economical with the facts about its problems. The City was led to expect break-even last year and ended up with a £7m loss. Even that bombshell, however, could not have prepared anyone for yesterday's £46m stumble.

Fortunately, Mindscape appears to be an isolated bowler, even if it rendered somewhat hollow Lord Blakenham's remarks at yesterday's AGM about the integration of the recent Harper Collins educational books purchase and the brighter news on the television front. But it is symptomatic of a deeper problem - Pearson's inability to put much focus on the corporate manoeuvrings of the past few years. There was never any logic in the collection of oil, banking, china and leisure businesses that Pearson once was, but there hardly seems to be any more to the current mish-mash of education, entertainment and information interests.

When you are up against the likes of Reuters, in the provision of information, and Disney, in the world of entertainment, mounting an effective challenge requires a marshalling of resources. It is simply asking too much for a business the size of Pearson to try and fight a war on so many fronts. Pearson has to decide what it wants to be

and go for it with conviction. With luck the arrival of a triumvirate of bright new directors two months ago could act as the catalyst the company needs to change. But they will have to chuck a large pile of sentimental baggage overboard in the process.

A happy honeymoon for the AIM

The flurry of new issues this week, including the glamorous if loss-making La Senza, is a reminder that the Alternative Investment Market is very nearly a year old, and a bonnier baby the Stock Exchange could not have hoped for. It would have been a brave forecast that predicted 142 companies trading on the new market by this early stage and a positively foolhardy one that promised that not one AIM stock would have gone bust in the first 11 months.

Just like its ultimately ill-starred predecessor, the Unlisted Securities Market, AIM has enjoyed a benign trading environment in which to put down roots. But that should not take away from its main achievement, which has been to convince institutional investors that it was worth a second look.

Only that has created the circumstances in which companies such as the satellite TV equipment group Pace Micro could consider floating with a market value approaching £200m. This is now a serious market.

The cynical view of all this is that the last few months have actually been little more than a honeymoon period. The size of most AIM companies, the narrow spread of their activities and the limited management experience of many of their directors, mean that a disaster is only a matter of time. What will matter then is the extent to which the limited due diligence companies' advisers are forced to carry out will be found wanting. The market is strong enough to survive, but if the exchange's light regulatory touch is the cause, that might well finish it.

More of a concern is the lack of liquidity and the unwholesome spreads imposed by the few market-makers willing to take on the risk of dealing in AIM shares. Even before you factor in dealing costs, the difference between buying and selling prices means a stock has to rise between 5 and 10 per cent just to recover the initial investment.

That is not an AIM-specific problem, however: it is the price you pay for investing in any small company. And it should not distract from the attractions of a good old-fashioned punter's market. As long as there is the prospect of picking the next Cufe Inns, up 48 per cent in March, or Firecrest, a 31 per cent rise last week alone, investors will rightly accept the risks.

Pearson stuns City with £46m Mindscape loss

TOM STEVENSON
City Editor

Pearson stunned shareholders at yesterday's annual meeting when the owner of Madame Tussauds and the *Financial Times* warned that Mindscape, a games software house it bought two years ago for £313m, would lose £46m this year. Analysts knew that the Californian business was in trouble, following a £7m loss in 1995, but the size of the shortfall exceeded even the most pessimistic forecasts.

Lord Blakenham, Pearson's chairman, signalled a continuation of the root-and-branch review of its failed diversification into multi-media, which has already seen it replace the company's chief executive this year. The problems at Mindscape are expected to increase pressure on management to sharpen the media and entertainment combine's focus as a way of fending off the predators that are rumoured to be circling the company.

Despite a far-reaching shift from a loose collection of industrial and service businesses a few years ago to a better-defined information, entertainment and education group, Pearson is still viewed as a slightly sleepy, family-run concern whose break-up value might be considerably in excess

of the price tag given to the combined whole by the stock market.

Lord Blakenham said just under half Mindscape's heavy losses would be due to poor trading, with the rest made up of a write-down against the development costs of products that would not now come to market, redundancy costs and a change in accounting treatment of software costs and royalties.

Anthony de Larrinaga, an analyst at Panmure Gordon, the stockbroker, said: "This has been a running sore and this is confirmation of it. It looks as though it will take quite a lot to turn this one around." Shares in Pearson, which had been buoyed by the recent bid spec-



Lord Blakenham: Thorough review continues

ulation, closed 18p lower at 677p, after touching 666p at one stage.

The expected losses at Mindscape were seized on by analysts as a reason to downgrade their profit forecasts for the year. Estimates were cut from about £274m for the 12 months to December to as low as £230m. For 1997 forecasts were trimmed to £310m from £335m.

Pearson bought Mindscape in April 1994, when the software industry was booming. Since then, the business has faced the collapse of the floppy disk market and intense price competition for software, particularly CD-ROMs.

Pearson admitted that, in order to boost sales last year, Mindscape had rushed to release a range of "mediocre" multi-media products before they were fully developed. It had tried to handle too many titles in too large a product range.

To return to profitability, Mindscape will have to concentrate on its core markets this year to develop a range of better-selling games for 1997, analysts said. They were divided, however, on the chances of success.

An analyst said Mindscape's problems indicated that Pearson had overpaid for Mindscape, adding that its next large acquisition could be treated with some caution by the market.



Unhealthy sign: The FDA rejection is a setback for Jan Leschly's SmithKline

SmithKline drug setback

MAGNUS GRIMOND

SmithKline Beecham shares plunged yesterday after a key committee of the US Food & Drug Administration unexpectedly rejected one of the giant drug group's most promising new compounds. Sales of Coreg, a heart drug, had been expected by some US analysts eventually to be worth more than \$1bn (£640m).

Analysts' forecasts were yesterday being slashed to between zero and \$200m after the cardiovascular and renal drugs advisory committee on Thursday voted four-to-two against recommending use of the treat-

ment. The decision is a setback for SmithKline, led by chief executive Jan Leschly, because rarely does the FDA overrule a committee recommendation. Shares in the group slid 49.5p to 662p, after dipping 33.5p overnight in New York.

One London analyst said: "The market is looking at this as a significant blow. Coreg was their highest-profile product and there were some very high expectations, particularly from US analysts, who were expecting to see sales of \$1bn-plus before the end of the century. That's going to have to be scaled back to say the least. There's no doubt this is a blow to sentiment."

Although Coreg is already approved in the US for high blood pressure, its main application is as a treatment for congestive heart failure, which is a principal cause of around 40,000 deaths in the US every year and a contributory factor in a further 225,000. The success of clinical trials caused their abandonment in February so that patients receiving the placebo could be given the new drug, which is being jointly developed with Boehringer Mannheim of Germany. The FDA committee said the trials' six-month length was insufficient to establish the efficacy of Coreg.

Companies urged to move fast on VAT

ROGER TRAPP

Companies are being urged to move quickly to claim against the Customs and Excise for repayment of value-added tax because of the danger of legislation being introduced to limit the amounts payable.

The advice came yesterday from Alan Buckett, national chairman of the VAT Practitioners Group, in the wake of last week's landmark court victory by furniture company Primark. The Court of Appeal held that Customs had wrongly calculated the VAT payable on goods sold through interest-free credit deals ever since the tax was introduced in 1973.

Since Customs is appealing against the decision to the House of Lords, no claims can yet be made. But many of Britain's retailers dealing in items such as televisions and washing machines as well as furniture are preparing proceedings in case the tax authorities lose.

Many VAT experts calculate that - if interest is included - the cost to the Exchequer could be as much as £5bn.

Mr Buckett, a VAT partner at accountants Binder Hamlyn, said the scale of the potential claims could prompt the Government into introducing a time limit. Ministers could also seek to pass wider anti-avoidance legislation, he added.

Customs said the idea was "pure speculation" at this stage.

It is also seeking to downplay the figures on the grounds that it is "extremely difficult to accurately quantify" the number of businesses that are in the same position as Primark.

It is understood that it believes the amount it would have to pay if it loses the House of Lords hearing will be less than £1bn.

However, this case - which follows the revelation of a £6bn shortfall in VAT revenue for the financial year just completed - is believed to be just the tip of the iceberg.

Research just published by accountants Coopers & Lybrand suggests that the "worst-case scenario" could see the Treasury having to pay out between £30bn and £40bn over the next three years.

The biggest claim involves the "blocking order" under which Customs does not allow British companies to claim back VAT on the cost of cars purchased for their fleets.

The case, being brought in the name of the drinks company formerly known as Allied-Lyons, is due in court shortly and could lead to claims totalling £15bn (£25bn).

Mr Buckett believes that figure is exaggerated, with the true amount likely to be between £5bn and £7bn. He also suggests that the overall amount given by Coopers is too high, since it would approach the sum that was the total VAT collected last year.

IN BRIEF

• **Andrew Winckler**, chief executive of the Securities and Investment Board, the City's top regulator, yesterday appealed for help from the pension fund industry to aid the compensation process for hundreds of thousands of victims of the £3bn mis-selling scandal. Mr Winckler admitted progress in the pension review had so far been heavily delayed. He said most of the obstacles in the way of achieving compensation for those who had been misled a personal pension had now been removed. He reiterated the regulator's threat to take action against pension companies or advisers who cause further delays.

• **Edinburgh's Roslin Institute**, hopes to raise between £25m to £30m from a flotation in early June. PPL uses so-called transgenic flocks of sheep to produce proteins which it is hoped can be used to treat a range of diseases including cystic fibrosis, emphysema and thrombosis and will produce products which both assist and prevent blood clotting. The first product, for cystic fibrosis, is not expected to be launched until 2001. The only profit in the company's nine-year life was £20,000 made in 1992.

• **Oxford Molecular** saw 15 million of its shares sold to raise £50m for its original venture capital investors yesterday. Brokers Cazenove placed the holdings with institutional investors. Derek Marsh, Oxford's finance director, said this was the first chance investors had to sell after a two-year standstill agreement following the biotechnology computer group's flotation in 1994. The investors each sold between one-third and a half of their holdings.

• **First National Bank**, Abbey National's consumer finance subsidiary, has paid United News & Media £108m for Wagon Finance, one of the UK's largest car finance companies. Wagon has about 5 per cent of the £20bn motor finance market and last year made pre-tax profits of £12.8m. Abbey said the deal is part of a move to lessen dependence on its core mortgage market.

• **Costain, Camas and Rugby** all warned about the dire state of the construction and building materials markets. They said the first half was difficult and indicated business may not improve until next year.

• **Virgin** has sold 90 former MGM cinemas to a management team led by Barry Jenkins and financed by CINVEN in a deal valued at £68m. The ABC Cinemas formed part of MGM Cinemas which was sold in 1995 to a consortium led by Virgin.

Money pages in the Weekend section

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OECD deficit forecasts jolt EMU launch hopes

SARAH HELM
Brussels

The prospect of launching the single currency in 1999 received another jolt yesterday when fresh economic forecasts predicted that both France and Germany would fail to meet the budget deficit targets in time.

French and German budget deficits will be above 3 per cent of gross domestic product in 1997, the year on which a country's economic performance will be judged, according to forecasts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Should France and Germany, the countries leading the drive towards the single currency, fail to meet the criteria, the 1999 launch date would have to be set back.

The decision on which countries qualify to join European

Monetary Union is to be taken in early 1998, on the basis of the 1997 results, and both Germany and France have so far resisted any moves to weaken the criteria.

The OECD forecasts, to be published shortly, were confirmed yesterday by Jean-Claude Paye, the secretary general. Although Mr Paye refused to give precise figures, he said: "The forecasts which have been made give something above 3 per cent for 1997."

The European Commission, which is due to publish its own economic forecasts on 15 May, showed no sign of concern over the OECD results, insisting that there was no reason to believe that the deadline for launching the single currency could not be met by Germany and France, as well as several other EU states. "We remain confident that there will be a

significant number of countries ready to participate in monetary union in 1999," a Commission spokesman said.

However, the Commission's own forecasts are being awaited with some nervousness in Paris and Bonn. Germany already faces the prospect of Commission sanctions after overshooting the deficit limit for 1995.

Both France and Germany are certain to insist that the gloomy predictions can be overturned by new drives to cut public spending. French officials are talking of "draconian" measures to curb spending and list plans to limit spending increases to the rise in inflation over the next four or five years.

Recent German spending cuts have aimed at public savings of about 50bn marks (£22bn) in 1997 and include deep welfare and tax cuts.

Halifax caught in pension row

NIC CICUTTI

Halifax Building Society faces a mass withdrawal of millions of pounds of deposits by pension schemes because it refuses to let their members benefit from the free shares bonanza which it floats on the stock market next year.

The Society has been told by the J Sainsbury pension scheme, which looks after the super-market giant's contributions, that it will pull out about £5m invested in Halifax's additional voluntary contributions deposit

account. A further £1m of annual payments made by the pension scheme on behalf of the store's 2,000 AVC contributors is also set to be diverted elsewhere.

The row looks likely to lead to mass withdrawals from Halifax's AVC deposit account, which currently holds about £123m of savers funds on behalf of about 400 pension schemes.

A Halifax spokeswoman said yesterday: "We cannot discuss this specific case because we regard it as confidential between ourselves and our clients. Our board made the decision not to

give free shares to depositors. This includes contributors to the AVC scheme, which is a deposit account."

Other pension trustees, including representatives of a £4bn scheme who declined to be named, are also thought to be close to withdrawing their money.

Anger at Halifax's stance is being fuelled by the fact that it currently pays just 5.4 per cent of annual interest on its deposit account to AVC savers. By contrast, Abbey National's equivalent account pays 5.94 per cent at present.

POSTAL INVESTMENT ACCOUNTS CURRENT INTEREST RATES

EFFECTIVE FROM 4 MAY 1996

THESE ACCOUNTS ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE TO NEW INVESTORS

Term	Rate	Term	Rate
POSTAL 120 (Annual)		POSTAL 7 (Annual)	
£25,000 or more	6.70	£100,000 or more	4.40
£10,000 - £24,999	6.30	£50,000 - £99,999	4.35
£5,000 - £9,999	5.90	£25,000 - £49,999	4.30
£500 - £4,999	5.50	£10,000 - £24,999	4.25
		£2,500 - £9,999	4.20
POSTAL 120 (Monthly)		£500 - £4,999	4.10
£25,000 or more	6.50	£500 - £4,999	4.00
£10,000 - £24,999	6.10		
£5,000 - £9,999	5.70	POSTAL 7 (Monthly)	
£500 - £4,999	5.30	£100,000 or more	4.31
		£50,000 - £99,999	4.27
POSTAL 90 (Annual)		£25,000 - £49,999	4.17
£25,000 or more	5.25	£10,000 - £24,999	4.13
£10,000 - £24,999	4.85	£2,500 - £9,999	4.09
£5,000 - £9,999	4.45	£500 - £4,999	4.05
£500 - £4,999	4.05		
POSTAL 60 (Monthly)		POSTAL ACCOUNT (Annual)	
£50,000 or more	5.13	Can now be operated through branches.	
£25,000 - £49,999	5.09	£100,000 or more	4.15
£10,000 - £24,999	4.75	£50,000 - £99,999	4.10
£5,000 - £9,999	4.38	£25,000 - £49,999	4.06
£500 - £4,999	3.98	£10,000 - £24,999	4.02
		£2,500 - £9,999	3.98
POSTAL 30 (Annual)		£500 - £4,999	3.94
£100,000 or more	4.65	£500 - £4,999	3.90
£50,000 - £99,999	4.50		
£25,000 - £49,999	4.35	POSTAL ACCOUNT (Monthly)	
£10,000 - £24,999	3.95	Can now be operated through branches.	
£5,000 - £9,999	3.55	£100,000 or more	4.10
£500 - £4,999	3.15	£50,000 - £99,999	4.06
		£25,000 - £49,999	4.02
POSTAL 30 (Monthly)		£10,000 - £24,999	3.98
£100,000 or more	4.55	£2,500 - £9,999	3.94
£50,000 - £99,999	4.41	£500 - £4,999	3.90
£25,000 - £49,999	4.27		
£10,000 - £24,999	3.87	GO DIRECT*	
£5,000 - £9,999	3.47	Can now be operated through branches.	
£500 - £4,999	3.07	£100,000 or more	4.12
		£50,000 - £99,999	4.08
POSTAL 30 (Annual)		£25,000 - £49,999	4.04
£100,000 or more	4.45	£10,000 - £24,999	4.00
£50,000 - £99,999	4.30	£2,500 - £9,999	3.96
£25,000 - £49,999	4.15	£500 - £4,999	3.92
£10,000 - £24,999	3.75		
£5,000 - £9,999	3.35		
£500 - £4,999	2.95		

* Rates apply to all 60-day term deposits. The circumstances in which the interest rate may vary are set out in the "Postal Investment Terms & Conditions" and "Postal Investment Guide" which can be obtained from any branch. Please contact your local branch for full details.

1 Interest will be paid on deposits of money in the form of cash or by cheque or by transfer from a bank or building society account. For details of the conditions of deposit, please refer to the "Postal Investment Terms & Conditions" and "Postal Investment Guide" which can be obtained from any branch. Please contact your local branch for full details.

NORTHERN ROCK

Northern Rock Building Society, Principal Office Northern Rock House, Garthwick, New York Avenue, New York, New York 10001.

market report/shares

DATA BANK

FT-SE 100
3751.6 -24.8

FT-SE 250
4545.3 -22.4

FT-SE 350
1902.2 -11.9

SEAG VOLUME
944.9m shares,
35,639 bargains

Glits Index
91.57 -0.48

Shares fell back again but would have suffered a savage mauling if two staid insurance groups had not confirmed that the merger bug is alive and well.

The £5.4bn deal putting together Royal Insurance and Sun Alliance would, under normal conditions, have set the stock market rumpus ahead: the admission that a bid approach had been made to Midlands Electricity would have provided the added glitz to the perfect day for the bulls there was even talk that next week the Government would be prompted to lower interest rates.

But against the backdrop of the Tory poll beating and growing signs of inflationary pressures in the US shares really did not have much of a chance.

The FT-SE 100 index, at one time down 41.8 points, ended 24.8 down at 3,751.6, with the

supporting FT-SE 250 index off 22.4 at 4,545.3. Footsie has fallen 81.2 this week and is 105.5 below its peak hit in the middle of last month.

Insurances, however, relished the appearance of takeover action - a development that had long been rumoured, with Commercial Union joining a hopeful run on Thursday.

Royal surged 67p to 437p and Sun 55p to 414p. The suspicion other deals will follow lifted GRE 38p to 271p. CU 25p to 615p and Legal & General 22p to 728p.

Regional electricity companies took heart from the Midlands approach. Southern, once the target for National Power, added 9p to 839p and Yorkshire Electricity 6p to 423p. Midlands jumped 38p to 423p.

The generators recovered some lost territory with NP 16p higher at 543p and Pow-



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

erGen, with 21 per cent of Midlands, 21p up at 557p.

BT and Cable and Wireless were friendly after the breakdown of merger talks. In busy trading BT gave up 13.5p to 338.5p and Cable 45p to 479p.

Profit warnings added to the torture. Pearson slipped 18p to 677p and Rugby came off 3.5p to 122p. Adscene, the media group, tumbled 32p to 263p, and Costain, the construction group, 10p to 89p.

BSkyB, the satellite television broadcaster, fell 20p to 454p ahead of figures on Tuesday. British Petroleum, also with figures on Tuesday, lost 3p to 582p.

Drugs suffered withdrawal

symptoms. SmithKline Beecham crashed 19.5p to 666p as the US Food & Drug Administration turned down its Corrug drug for heart treatment.

The shares have been strong on hopes of FDA clearance and talk of a big deal. Glaxo Wellcome was caught in the SKB slipstream, losing 14p to 800p.

Smith & Nephew continued to progress on its skin-growing alliance, moving 3p to 197.5p. Stryker, the US medical equipment maker, made another return to market. The shares touched 87p, closing at 79p against a 75p placing price.

Oxford Molecular gained 13p to 326p as Cazenove, the

stockbroker, placed 15 million shares with institutions at around 300p.

They came from the original venture capital backers of the group. It was the first opportunity they have had to sell following a two-year lock-up to help their holdings.

MSB International, the computer group which made a sparkling debut on Thursday, fell 9p to 234p. The shares were sold at 190p.

Colorvision, the electrical retailer, had a see-saw session after the Office of Fair Trading corrected a blunder over the company's consumer credit licence.

Down to 16p the shares surged to 41p once the mistake was rectified. They closed at 32p, up 6p.

Pan Andean Resources gained 6p to 96p on its Bolivian progress report and Jarvis, the construction group,

made further headway, up 5.25p to 64p, on hopes of a deal with British Rail.

Iain Business, the pubs chain, held at 54p as United Breweries, the Indian group, sold 3.8 million shares; it still has around 7 per cent.

Tottenham Hotspur's improving chance of a place in Europe next season lifted the shares 26p to 373p, with the nil paid rights in line, up 26p to 93p.

Arcon International Resources held at 35p; Finnish group, Outokumpu, was said to have sold its 4.5 per cent stake at 27p.

It was also rumoured to have sold shares in another Irish resources share, Ivernia West, unchanged at 83p.

Pemberton, a property group, held at 80p. It is bidding for the Oxford-traded Best Peninsular Homes, which has residential property in the South-west. The cash offer is 62p against 48p on Oxford.

TAKING STOCK

Adlador Group raced back into the takeover arena in late trading after rumours swept the market that Hilton Hotels Corporation, known to be talking to a bid, was to be taken over through a bond issue.

The latest story is HILK, a US group, will mount a cash and share offer of 240p with in the next few weeks. As part of the deal, Adlador's management will buy out the group's betting and casino interests.

The shares cut an early fall to 2p at 193p in busy late trading.

A bidder could be on the prowl for Harry Ramsden's, the renowned fish and chip chain. The shares have been strong lately.

They rose 14p to 384p compared with a 326p close on Monday.

Alcoholic Beverages

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Banks, Merchant

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Barclays	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Scotland	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Ireland	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of London	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Montreal	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of New York	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Paris	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Spain	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of Tokyo	12.50	0.00	0.0
Bank of West	12.50	0.00	0.0

Banks, Retail

Stock	Price	Chg	%
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0
ABN-AMRO	12.50	0.00	0.0

Breweries, Pubs & Rest

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Building/Construction

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Building Materials

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Chemicals

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Distributors

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Diversified Industrials

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Engineering Vehicles

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Engineering

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Electronics

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Food Manufacturers

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Government Securities

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Health Care

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Household Goods

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Insurance

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

International

Stock	Price	Chg	%
Adnoca	12.50	0.00	0.0
Burns	12.50	0.00	0.0
Carlsberg	12.50	0.00	0.0
Heineken	12.50	0.00	0.0
Interbrew	12.50	0.00	0.0
King's	12.50	0.00	0.0
Miller	12.50	0.00	0.0
Orkla	12.50	0.00	0.0
Reckitt	12.50	0.00	0.0
Seagrams	12.50	0.00	0.0

Leisure & Hotels

103	84	B&E	328	0	0	30	20
104	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
105	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
106	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
107	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
108	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
109	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
110	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
111	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
112	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
113	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
114	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
115	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
116	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
117	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
118	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
119	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
120	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
121	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
122	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
123	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
124	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
125	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
126	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
127	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
128	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
129	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
130	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
131	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
132	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
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137	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
138	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
139	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
140	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
141	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
142	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
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171	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
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184	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
185	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
186	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
187	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
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193	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
194	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
195	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
196	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
197	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
198	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
199	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0
200	84	Black Mining	10	0	0	0	0

Pooley hits out for Middlesex

Cricket

DEREK PRINGLE
reports from Lord's
Middlesex 200 and 207-4
Gloucestershire 218

Middlesex showed just what a resilient side they are yesterday and why they cannot be regarded as Championship contenders despite a wholesale rebuilding program. Yesterday, they simply did what they had to do, which was to bowl Gloucestershire out and then take a lead by the close. They accomplished

both with some ease and Gloucestershire now find themselves chasing the game.

Starting their second innings with a deficit of 18 runs, the London county began with an opening stand of 124. The pitch offered perceptibly less seam movement than on Thursday and neither Jason Pooley nor Paul Weekes looked at all troubled. Possibly their left-handedness was a factor and with both batsmen stretching well forward, Kevin Cooper's probing swing, such a fertile source of wickets on Thursday, was neutered. While at the Pavilion

End, Mike Smith's line with the new ball was a fraction too wide to force early mistakes. After starting less surely than his partner, Pooley moved into overdrive, hitting Jonathan Lewis for three successive fours. Pooley has a reputation for having a shrewd cricketing brain. If so, his game plan when Jack Russell introduced the first over of spin - shortly after three o'clock - was more village blacksmith than Voltaire as Richard Davis's two overs of left-arm spin from the Nursery End cost 18 runs.

When Smith did get his line right, Weekes, uncertain about whether or not to leave the ball, edged to Davis at slip. A few balls later Pooley followed, bowled off his pads by a perversely Cooper, who looked as if he was about ready for a long soak in the bath.

This year, Middlesex hope to video every ball during the season, although the comprehensive coverage does rather rely on someone remembering to pop out every three hours to change the tape.

It may or may not prove instructive and an early viewer would probably have been John Carr, who looked more than a little befuddled as to how his off-stump had come to be knocked back after he had pushed well forward to Smith, who then promptly removed Keith Brown, caught off bat and pad at short-leg.

David Follitt, on the other hand, would probably want a dozen copies run-off, the early part of the day proving a particular triumph for the Middlesex seamer. Before this match, Follitt's career figures of 1-95, read like a batsman's wet dream. With Angus Fraser not moving as breezily as he had done the first evening, Follitt impressively took command, finishing with 5-94, including the wicket of Jack Russell, who mis-knobbed to Weekes at square-leg.

Any hopes Gloucestershire had of taking a substantial first innings lead, quickly departed when Andrew Symonds was out to the first ball he faced. That his side ended with any kind of lead at all was due to a whirlwind last wicket partnership between Davis and the No 11 Smith, who played seven fours in an innings that even warmed Gating's hands after he dropped him on four, at slip.

A lengthy presence at the crease with Rampersath today, ought to absolve him.



One jumper ahead: Sachin Tendulkar goes in during India's opening tour game at Osterley yesterday

Photograph: Peter Jay

Tendulkar warms to the task

ROBERT WINDER

England's cricketers usually make quite a lot of noise about the need to acclimatise to the heat and humidity of far away places. So you had to feel sorry for India's touring team, which celebrated its arrival here with the traditional social encounter against Indian Gymkhana in west London yesterday.

The tour manager, Sandip Patel, described the game as a "good warm-up", but warm-up was very much not the operative word. An icy wind sliced across Heathrow and numbed the fingers of a team that, since its ignominious departure from the World Cup in Calcutta last month, has played two one-day

tournaments in Asia. Calcutta, Singapore, Sharjah, Osterley - the roll call of exotic cricket venues never seems to end. India gave some of their players a chance to put in some serious autographing. Neeraj Sidhu signed programmes, bats, books and old bits of tissue paper with his fingers stuffed up his sleeves, while the lucky recipients of his signature cried: "Look! Kumble!"

Mohammad Azharuddin was busy having physio in the pavilion, and Smith and Manprekash were also rested. Batting first, India were not looking too pretty at 65 for 4, but Tendulkar, captain for the day, scored 70 without breaking sweat, or taking off any of his jumpers. In the end he was caught and bowled by a maths

teacher called Davinder Rehncy in what will, for sure, be a dining out moment for years to come. "He'd just smashed me for six," Rehncy said. "And then he hit a slower ball straight up in the air. I thought about Courtney Browne dropping Tendulkar off one of those in the World Cup, but luckily I held it. He was amazing, actually. I was so nervous. You're bowling at Test batsmen and then you bowl at him, and it's another level."

India were all out for 184, not exactly an imposing total, but more than enough. Kunal Hazare, the 16-year-old grandson of a former Test captain, picked up 3 for 20 in eight overs of slow left arm, but the tourists' bowling always looked a bit sharp for the home side. The Gymkhana

lost wickets steadily as they tottered to 88 all out. Still, the result was hardly the point. It is no longer the case that cricketers need to get cobwebs out of their system; they never stop playing long enough. But the game did provide them with a quick reminder of what it means to bat on slow, seaming English wickets. But no one was injured and the crowd was happy - it was also about the same size as the one at most county matches, only more boisterous. At the end someone even started banging a drum, and what with the air full of tandoori smells they could almost have been at home. Apart from the frost, that is.

ONE-DAY FRIENDLY (Osterley) India 184 (38.5 overs; S Tendulkar 70; India Gymkhana 88, India won by 96 runs.

Stark in pursuit despite mistake

Equestrianism

GENEVIEVE MURPHY
reports from from Badminton

David O'Connor retained his overnight lead on Custom Made during yesterday's second day of dressage at the Mitsubishi Badminton Horse Trials, but Ian Stark and Mark Todd are now within one penalty point of the leader as riders prepare for today's cross-country.

At one stage O'Connor held the top two places for the United States, before first Todd and then Stark nudged the American's second mount, Lightfoot, back to fourth. Stark might have been leading for Britain, but for a mistake in the second movement when the grey, Stanwick Ghost, broke into canter during medium trot.

"I got greedy," Stark said. "I committed the cardinal sin of asking for more when I already had enough." The Scot, so long a mainstay of the British team, was delighted with the grey thoroughbred who has the mischievous mind of a pony. Stark is a mere 0.5pt behind the leader and just 1.1pt ahead of Todd, the double Olympic champion from New Zealand, who is now third on Bertie Blunt. Last year Todd's stirrup leather broke and he rode most of the cross-country without one iron, finishing that phase in third place before Bertie Blunt failed the final horse inspection.

"Robert and Melita Howell, who own Bertie, have bought me some new stirrup leathers that I'll be using for the cross-country," Todd said with a wry grin.

O'Connor's second mount, Lightfoot, had a more serious problem at Boekelo in the Netherlands last October, when an ambulance ran into him while he was on the cross-country course. "I figured you have the right of way when you're riding the course, I didn't expect to be tipped over by an ambulance," O'Connor said. "We were both badly bruised after that."

MITSUBISHI BADMINTON HORSE TRIALS (Class): Standings after dressage: 1 Custom Made (D O'Connor, US) 40.4; 2 Stanwick Ghost (D Stark, GB) 40.6; 3 Bertie Blunt (D Todd, NZ) 41.2; 4 Lightfoot (D O'Connor, US) 41.8; 5 Bounce (V Jefferys, NZ) 43.0; 6 Just Jimmy (H H Murray, GB) 43.2; 7 Broadmoor (V Latta, NZ) 44.4; 8 Star Appeal (M King, GB) 45.0; 9 Troubadour (H Bell, GB) 45.4; 10 New Favourite (L Law, GB) 46.2.

Collingwood keeps up first-ball tradition

HENRY BLOFIELD

reports from Chester-le-Street
Northants 273-3 v Durham

If neither county rose to any great heights on their opening day of the championship, it was not to be wondered at in such uncharitably cold weather. One player who will remember the day was Paul Collingwood, who became the second player in two days, after Middlesex's James Hewitt, to take a wicket with his first ball in first-class cricket.

The players struggled all day in the teeth of a fierce easterly wind after Mike Roseberry had put Northamptonshire into bat in the vague hope that his seam bowlers might have used the damp conditions to their advantage. There had been no play on Thursday.

Roseberry will not have been entirely unhappy at the way things turned out either. His 21-year-old fast bowler, Melvyn Betts, starting his third season with Durham with the modest tally of 128 wickets to his name, not only took 4 for 99, his best figures, but also showed that his control has greatly improved.

He has a sprinter's approach to the wicket over 20 paces, he bowls from reasonably close to the stumps and for a time more than justified the three slips and a gully his captain gave him. Bowling downwind for the most part he raised a lively pace and moved the ball away from the right-handers.

In the latter part of the morning, when Northamptonshire lost three wickets in 212 balls, he found an excellent partner in Michael Foster, a 23-year-old all-rounder whose career has already taken him from Yorkshire to Northamptonshire and on to Durham. Yesterday, he was celebrating the award of a two-year contract with Durham.

He has a strong pair of shoulders and also bowls from close to the stumps, moving the ball towards the slips at just about medium pace. He and Betts shared those first three wickets and might well have had more.

Northamptonshire were given a solid start by Richard Montgomery and Alan Fordham, who put on 69, Fordham contributing two massive pulls for six. These two and Mal Loye were then out in quick succession before Rob Bailey and Russell Warren steadied the innings with a stand of 68.

Roseberry was strangely reluctant to bring back Betts after lunch, but when he did so Warren drove loosely and was caught in the gully. Earlier Collingwood had marked his first-class debut with a fine catch two-handed to his left at second slip which accounted for Montgomery.

At 176 for 4, he came on to bowl and with his first ball yorked David Capel. Two runs later Bailey drove Betts lamely to mid-off but two dropped slip catches, excusable in this temperature, allowed Kevin Curran and Tony Penberthy to give the Northamptonshire score a more respectable look.

Moxon reveals as Yorkshire hit record-breaking form

DEREK HODGSON

reports from Cardiff
Yorkshire 536-8 dec
Glamorgan 132-2

Welcome to Sophia Gardens - the Home of Records. If coachloads of statisticians and computer nerds were expected for the numerically literate, Glamorgan were disappointed. But there was a good crowd, the Baron Baguette did record business and mere cricket-lovers could always shut their eyes to the scoreboard and enjoy the play.

After Thursday's cold misery,

this was a sparkling May day, one fit for great deeds. The editor of *Wisden's Almanack* arrived hotfoot, records tumbled regularly but, in the end, not one was big enough for a major revision.

Martyn Moxon played two maidens from Robert Croft, and after 15 minutes play, in the 100th over, he pushed a single through midwicket off Darren Thomas to reach 323, a record for any Yorkshire wicket against Glamorgan.

At 335 the pair passed the highest opening stand against Glamorgan (Barrie Duleston and John Steele, for Leicestershire, 1975) and at 351 the highest for Yorkshire since the

war (Boycott and Moxon at Worcester in 1985). Michael Vaughan has reached 183 and was on course to overtake the highest individual Yorkshire score against Glamorgan - 197 by Hutton in 1937 - when, carving at the new ball, he fell to a flying right-handed catch by Adrian Dale at cover.

The stand was worth 362 in 399 minutes and Vaughan's innings included 28 boundaries off 314 balls, not a bad entry for either his cv or for chairman Illingworth's notebook.

Yorkshire then tried to force the pace but Croft, switching to the Cathedral Road End, found increasing turn after David Byes had fallen to the persistent

Steven Watkin. *Wisden's* editor, seeing that the famous 555 stand of Holmes and Sutcliffe remained inviolate, set off to seek sensation elsewhere.

The distinction of being the first Tyke to take a double hundred off Glamorgan thus fell to Moxon, who completed the fifth double century of his career before becoming Croft's fourth victim when, after 413 balls and eight hours' batting, he mistimed a pull and was caught at deep fine leg.

Three more departed before Richard Blakey and Darren Gough, who was dropped twice, scored hits, the declaration coming just before 3.15 with Glamorgan being left 46 overs

to bat yesterday and needing 387 to avoid a follow-on.

When Hugh Morris, on one, was dropped at first slip off Peter Hartley, the fitters could be sensed. But with a little luck, and the confidence to strike the looser ball, Steve James and Morris guided Glamorgan beyond tea.

With 76 raised and 23 overs negotiated, Glamorgan appeared to have reached safer water when James went to drive a ball from Peter Hartley that may have lifted - Thomas has made one or two fly from the River End - and was caught behind. Two overs later Adrian Dale could not avoid a straighter, similar delivery.

CRICKET SCOREBOARD

Britannia Assurance County Championship (Second day of four) Middlesex v Gloucestershire Lord's: Today: 11.0

Middlesex won toss
Middlesex - First innings 200 (R E Cooper 4-54)

Gloucestershire - First innings
(Overseas: 54 for 4)
A Symonds c Cart b Hewitt 42
M Walford c Cart b Hewitt 39
R C Russell c Weekes b Follitt 26
R Davis not out 16
J Lewis c Cart b Follitt 6
K Cooper b Follitt 6
M Smith b Follitt 2
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 24
Total (54 overs) 200
Fall: 5-56, 6-135, 7-150, 8-180, 9-170
Bowling: Fraser 17-7-33; Follitt 16-3-34; S Hewitt 17-4-7; Goodchild 2-0-11-0

Middlesex - Second innings
(Overseas: 54 for 4)
P Walford c Cart b Follitt 50
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J C Cart b Cooper 39
M Walford not out 14
R C Russell c Cart b Follitt 14
R Davis c Cart b Follitt 14
K Cooper c Cart b Follitt 14
M Smith c Cart b Follitt 14
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 14
Total (54 overs) 200
Fall: 1-124, 2-124, 3-148, 4-150
Bowling: Fraser 17-7-33; Follitt 16-3-34; S Hewitt 17-4-7; Goodchild 2-0-11-0

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Yorkshire - First innings
(Overseas: 536-8 dec)
M Moxon c Cart b Hewitt 183
P Walford c Cart b Hewitt 183
R C Russell c Weekes b Follitt 26
R Davis not out 16
J Lewis c Cart b Follitt 6
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Yorkshire - Second innings
(Overseas: 536-8 dec)
M Moxon c Cart b Hewitt 183
P Walford c Cart b Hewitt 183
R C Russell c Weekes b Follitt 26
R Davis not out 16
J Lewis c Cart b Follitt 6
K Cooper b Follitt 6
M Smith b Follitt 2
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 24
Total (54 overs) 200
Fall: 5-56, 6-135, 7-150, 8-180, 9-170
Bowling: Fraser 17-7-33; Follitt 16-3-34; S Hewitt 17-4-7; Goodchild 2-0-11-0

Gloucestershire - Second innings
(Overseas: 54 for 4)
A Symonds c Cart b Hewitt 42
M Walford c Cart b Hewitt 39
R C Russell c Weekes b Follitt 26
R Davis not out 16
J Lewis c Cart b Follitt 6
K Cooper b Follitt 6
M Smith b Follitt 2
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 24
Total (54 overs) 200
Fall: 5-56, 6-135, 7-150, 8-180, 9-170
Bowling: Fraser 17-7-33; Follitt 16-3-34; S Hewitt 17-4-7; Goodchild 2-0-11-0

Middlesex - Second innings
(Overseas: 54 for 4)
P Walford c Cart b Hewitt 50
J Lewis c Cart b Hewitt 46
J C Cart b Cooper 39
M Walford not out 14
R C Russell c Cart b Follitt 14
R Davis c Cart b Follitt 14
K Cooper c Cart b Follitt 14
M Smith c Cart b Follitt 14
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 14
Total (54 overs) 200
Fall: 1-124, 2-124, 3-148, 4-150
Bowling: Fraser 17-7-33; Follitt 16-3-34; S Hewitt 17-4-7; Goodchild 2-0-11-0

Gloucestershire - Second innings
(Overseas: 54 for 4)
A Symonds c Cart b Hewitt 42
M Walford c Cart b Hewitt 39
R C Russell c Weekes b Follitt 26
R Davis not out 16
J Lewis c Cart b Follitt 6
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R C Russell c Cart b Follitt 14
R Davis c Cart b Follitt 14
K Cooper c Cart b Follitt 14
M Smith c Cart b Follitt 14
Extras (b, lb, w, nb) 14
Total (54 overs) 2

sport

The FA are really terrified that the idea might get about that women footballers are a bunch of lager-swilling laddesses

Pete Davies, the man who single-handedly revived the popularity of football literature with *All Played Out*, his compelling account of the 1990 World Cup campaign, has a new love in his life. Gone is his infatuation with Waddle and Lineker, Robson and Robson, 4-4-2 and Gazza's tears (although over this past month, we've all learnt there was nothing unusual in Gazza blubbing when the football didn't go his way; he is after all, just a Geordie). And in its place has come a desire so profound that Davies has moved his house to be close to its source, given up lucrative work to pursue it, spent most of his weekends in search of it. In short, Pete Davies has lost his heart to the Doncaster Belles.

That's the title of his superb new book about women's football, a fly-

on-the-wall picture of the country's leading female outfit, a sort of elongated love note to 15 hard-working, hard-playing, female fanatics.

"The title's not a joke," Davies said. "I did, honestly, I lost my heart to them. I knew the club existed, but I didn't know any more. Then a friend told me he was making a television film about them and suggested it would make a good article. The moment I met them I knew there was a book in it, they were so passionate, so involved. I went to write about them for a week and stayed for two years."

Davies's new tome is as intimate a chronicle of a football team as can have been written. He followed the girls to work, to training, to the pub; it's all there, the camaraderie, the petty jealousies, the battles with the

blazers at the FA. And the fact it's about women - generally derided by media and public alike for the manner in which they trundle around in pursuit of the ball - makes the pleasure of it all the more unexpected.

There's no question the quality of the women's game is very high," Davies said. "I want this book to proselytise. I passionately believe these people deserve reward, recognition, crowds."

In an attempt to make an early convert, Davies invited me to the women's FA Cup final at Millwall's New Den last Sunday. Doncaster Belles, his loves, weren't even playing. The finalists were Liverpool and Croydon, the Manchester United of women's football, not because they are any good, but because everyone else hates them. Most of the 2,110

Jim White



ON SATURDAY

people scattered across two of the New Den's fancy stands were women and many of them, judging by the tone of their heckling, players themselves: "that's crap that is; release it early; lay it off, girl."

The game was, in truth, a scrappy affair, the players looked tense, shots were scuffed, passes were misplaced as a matter of course. "Just like a Premiership game," Davies smiled. It seemed inevitable it would go to penalties and that Croydon would grind out a win, by dint of missing fewer. But there were enough touches - Liverpool's No 7 Karen Burke was a class act - to suggest it was the occasion rather than a lack of ability that was to blame. Davies, though, was worried by the occupants of the directors' box. Graham Kelly and Bert Millichip were in there, the men who have recently taken over the women's game, and come out of his book as the villains. Here they were actually bothering to turn up to a women's match and it wasn't exactly a feast.

"The FA say they are committed to the women's game," Davies said. "But there's very little evidence of that. I honestly feel they are uneasy with the concept of women playing football. They're certainly going to hate this book. They're obsessed with the idea might get about that women footballers are a bunch of lager-swilling laddesses."

Are they? "Yes," he says. "But that's the point. They're ordinary people for whom football makes something of lives that would be otherwise remorselessly bleak. That's what I'm trying to communicate with this book: it's a beautiful game that can do that." Davies, you feel, has his work cut out acting as the game's unofficial PR man. This was how Alan Green

announced the result of the match to Radio 5 listeners: "And we've just heard that Liverpool have been beaten by Croydon in the FA Cup final. But don't panic, it's only the Ladies' FA Cup final."

That kind of thing doesn't deter him, though. "It's going to be massive this game," he says. "If some smart company gets involved now in sponsoring it, they could achieve an awful lot in the long term."

And how about his own long term, has he got a daughter? "Yes."

Is she any good at the game? "She's three," he smiles. "But she can't half trap a ball." *'I Lost My Heart to the Doncaster Belles' is published by Heinemann on 28 May.*

Schumacher's charge lifts Ferrari fans

DAVID TREMAYNE
reports from Imola

As the sun warmed away morning rain, Michael Schumacher gave Ferrari's delirious fans exactly what they had come to see when he recorded the fastest time in practice here yesterday for tomorrow's San Marino Grand Prix.

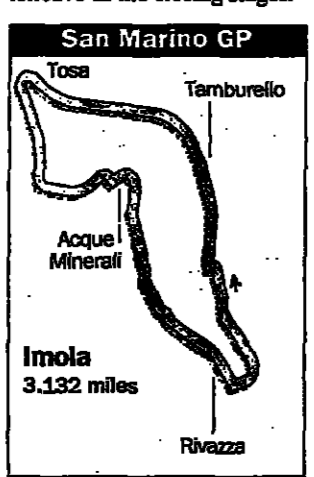
The world champion used all of his famous repertoire of raw speed and car control as he powered the red machine around in glorious slides, raising eyebrows along the pit road and hopes among the tifosi, the Italian Ferrari enthusiasts.

A year ago Schumacher was one of their villains and Jean Alesi and Gerhard Berger their heroes. But times change. The volatile Frenchman no longer enjoys a place within tifosi hearts after his winter outbursts against the team. There were only crocodile tears when he finished the day in 13th place.

Alesi's excessive brio does not always endear him to Benetton either. In Germany a week ago a reckless attempt to pass Mika

Salo's Tyrrell after a bad start resulted in instant retirement after contact.

Schumacher's speed yesterday caught many on the hop, particularly since it had been achieved with the standard V10 engine, and without using a set of fresh tyres - the latter play catapulted Rubens Barrichello's Jordan-Peugeot into second place ahead of the European Grand Prix winner Jacques Villeneuve in the closing stages.



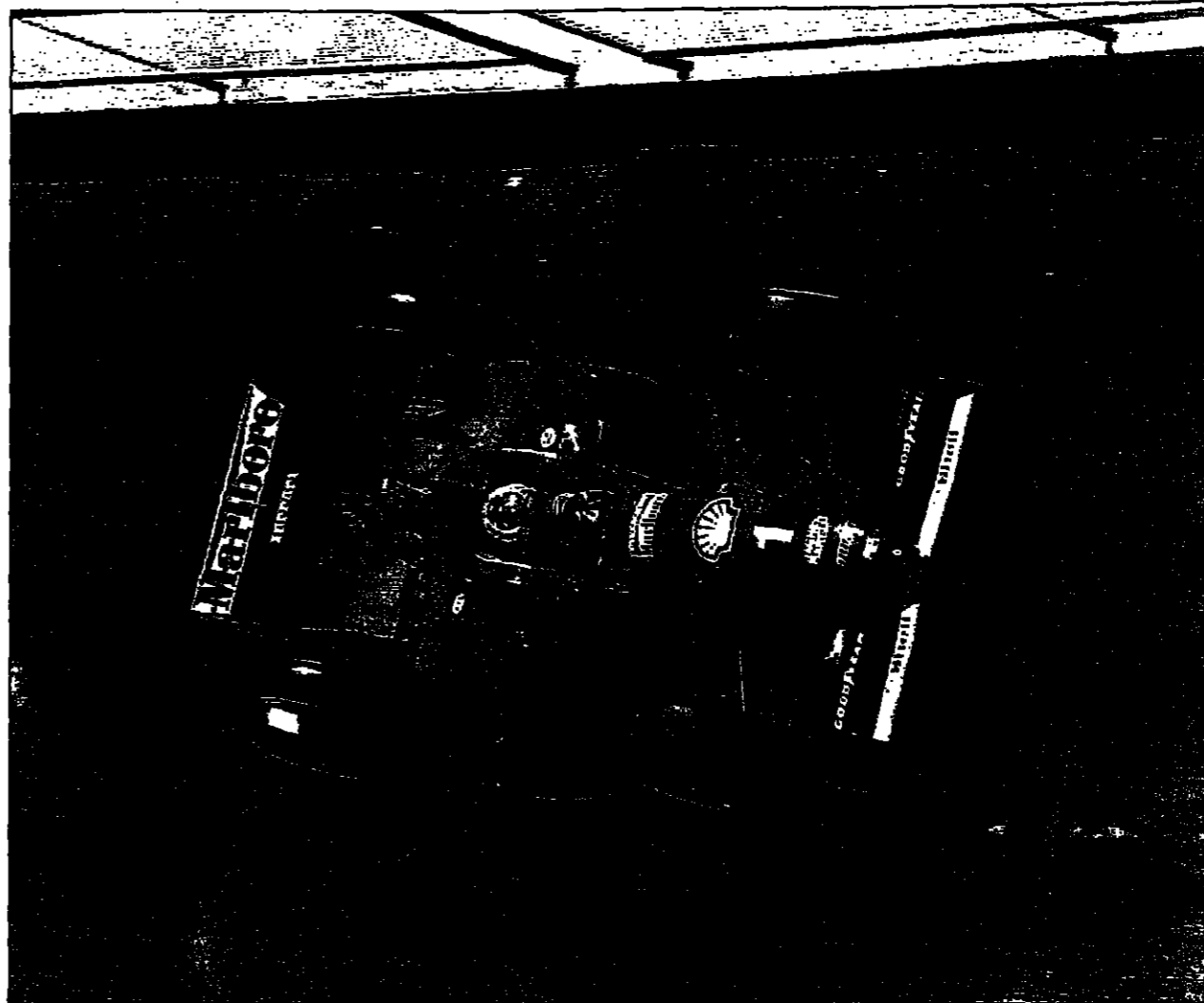
"I am feeling confident," said Schumacher who only a week ago had suggested that he felt the very opposite about his prospects on a circuit whose numerous bumps would not suit his car. "We did a lot of work on set-up today and used less fuel than we normally do on a Friday in order to conserve our tyres [drivers are allowed only seven sets of tyres per weekend]. We still have a lot of work to do," Schumacher said.

Damon Hill echoed that sentiment as he languished a relatively lowly sixth separated from his Williams-Renault partner by Mika Hakkinen's McLaren and Olivier Panis's Ligier. His run was interrupted by an altercation with Andrea Mantovani's Forti, which resulted in a trip across the edge of a gravel bed.

Hill was cautious in summarising his day. "You can always expect Ferrari to go quickly here," he said, "and they were close to us in Germany too, so I expect Saturday's qualifying to be close and very exciting. The circuit was very slippery today and it's uneven in places so it's quite difficult to

set up the car." Williams spent all day juggling with the springs and dampers in its cars' suspension systems to try and find the optimum handling balance, and Hill added: "I have something in hand for qualifying."

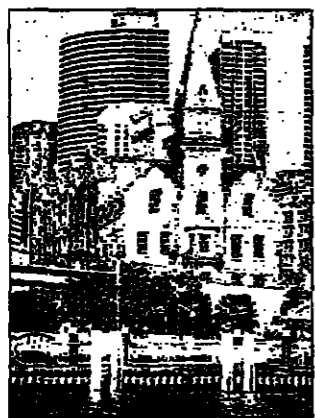
Imola is of course a circuit that holds mixed memories for Hill and the Williams team. They won here last year but it was during the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994 that Ayrton Senna was killed while trying to resist the challenge of Schumacher and Benetton. As he goes out in search of his 15th pole position this afternoon Hill knows he must win here to exorcise the old ghosts of questions about his psychological frailty raised by his disappointing race in Germany last week. Cynics, meanwhile, say they will believe Ferrari's apparently dramatic progress if it is repeated today - and tomorrow.



Michael Schumacher pushes his Ferrari to the fastest time in practice yesterday

Photograph: John Marsh/Emphas

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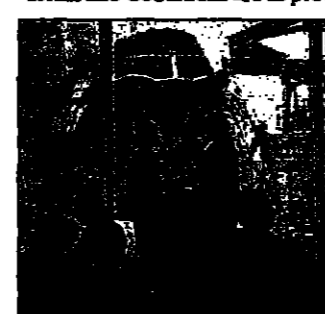
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SPORT



PILKINGTON CUP FINAL

Bath and Leicester to stage grand finale

23

United face the Captain Marvel factor

Football
GUY HODGSON

An alarming vision has been disturbing Manchester United supporters since it became clear the championship could be decided on the season's final day tomorrow. They see a mud-spattered figure charging into the arena, determination dripping from every pore, to head the goal that denies United a third Premiership title in four years.

The figure is Bryan Robson, and the thought of Old Trafford's Captain Marvel turning into a mud-spattered figure has been enough to give United supporters anxiety attacks. The Middlesbrough player-manager, too, in all probability, because he is an invidious position.

The chances of Robson taking the field tomorrow are slight – the prospect of becoming a latter-day Denis Law is too awful – but he would probably prefer if the club he is most associated with could win the title almost anywhere else. If Middlesbrough win, he could be denying old friends a prize, lose limply and the mutterings from Newcastle about collusion will begin.

Which is hard on Middlesbrough who have played since Christmas like they could lose to United's youth team, never mind the champions elect. In their last League eight matches at the Riverside, they have won only once and as that was against the Premiership's current whipping boys, Sheffield Wednesday.

Given usual circumstances you would expect United to get the win they need, but the conditions are far from normal and they might well be clinging on to a point by tomorrow evening while hoping Newcastle do not get the six goals they need against Tottenham at St James' Park to deny them on goal difference.

"I must have had 80,000 let-

ters from United supporters this season wishing me well," Robson, who still lives in the Manchester area, said. "I wouldn't like to lose them as fans but we have 27,000 season tickets to try to entertain. I can assure everyone my players will be determined to do their best."

Words that will soothe a few battered souls on Tyneside who are enlarging straws to the size of planks as they clutch for something to forget they once had a 12-point lead. "I think the way we performed showed we have the ability to win the title," Kevin Keegan, their manager, said after Thursday's 1-1 draw against Nottingham Forest virtually buried their hopes, "but it's not how we play now, it's how the table looks."

Little has gone right for Newcastle in their run-in and even the choice of opponent tomorrow could be better as Tottenham require a win to help their UEFA Cup aspirations. A defeat for both championship contenders, and an anti-climactic conclusion, is not out of the question. When it comes to disappointing finishes, however, Sheffield Wednesday are becoming masters. Six years ago they appeared on the blind side of everyone and managed to snatch relegation on the line and this year they making a pretty fine job of staging a repeat, matching their 1990 run of four points in six games going into their final game.

If they lose tomorrow and Southampton, Coventry and Manchester City win, Wednesday are relegated. "I've had sleepless nights," David Pleat, their manager said. "We have to assume that the other teams below us will win. We have to believe that otherwise our attitude may be wrong. We're ready for the weekend of decision."

So are Manchester City, whose weekend could be made complete by neighbours United

winning the championship while they are relegated. They face Liverpool at Maine Road knowing they have to do better than their relegation rivals because goal difference could condemn them.

The City manager, Alan Ball, is looking for a similar performance to the 1-0 win at Aston Villa last weekend. "I asked them to sweat blood that day and they did," he said. "If we do the same again we will have no fears against Liverpool." A repeat of the victory last Easter that eased their relegation problems last season would do nicely.

Should City prevail fans of Southampton could be watching the last performance for the club by Matt Le Tissier, who has said he will leave if they are relegated. They face Wimbledon, who are underdogs with sharp teeth but more supine when it comes to teams of level rank.

Coventry showed that last week when they won 2-0 at Selhurst Park. Seasoned escapologists, if they could have chosen their opponents tomorrow they would probably have plumped for Leeds who have had six successive defeats – their worst run since 1948 – and have collected 33 out of their last 102 points.

This is the ninth time in the 29 seasons Coventry have been in the top flight that their survival has depended on the final match and every time they have been successful. The one black omen is their manager, Ron Atkinson, who presided over Sheffield Wednesday's fall in 1990.

As an interesting footnote to Wednesday's black day, Middlesbrough saved themselves from relegation to the old Third Division with a 4-1 victory on their old ground, Ayresome Park. Their opponents on that occasion were Newcastle.

The championship's 10 vital games, page 26
United's seats of yearning, page 8
Fan's early release, page 4



It could be you: Glenn Hoddle (left), preparing his Chelsea players yesterday for their last game under his reign as manager, at home to Blackburn tomorrow, picks out the Dutchman Ruud Gullit, who could become his successor at Stamford Bridge. Photograph: Robert Hallam

Gullit interested in Chelsea job

Ruud Gullit yesterday opened the way for Chelsea to appoint him as Glenn Hoddle's successor at Stamford Bridge.

The move would clearly win the approval of the new England coach, who stressed that "continuity" is all important as he prepared for an emotional farewell at home to Blackburn tomorrow. Chelsea's hierarchy met before that game to discuss their options.

"I haven't heard anything officially, but because of all the ru-

mours you are thinking about how you would do it," Gullit said yesterday. "I would need to talk to them about how things would be run, what would you like to change. There are so many things to think about, but the job hasn't been offered yet."

"It is wise to consider it now because everyone is talking about it. I was honoured by the way the fans reacted and also the way the players reacted."

Hoddle, back at the club's training ground, spoke at some

length about his new job with England. "I don't want to get too involved with what is going to happen with England at the moment," he said. "It's not fair to Terry [Venables]; he's got a massive job on his hands and he doesn't want a side circus."

"I'll be stepping into the background and looking at Moldova, Georgia and Poland. I already have the fixtures and have got something set in my mind about what I'm going to do."

"Whatever anyone says, it's a

full-time job. And what I've done here [at Chelsea] from schoolboys right through, I want to understand a little bit [with England]."

"I'm sure Terry has done that anyway, but I really want to look at the Under-21s and Under-18s. The FA have been good enough to give me a four-year contract and it is worth looking at that and bringing things through."

"The opportunity has come even quicker than I ever thought it would. Some people get them, some don't and I've had the

courage to say 'yes' and I'm very positive. But it's very important that Terry gets on with having a successful summer and that will make my job easier."

Jean-Marc Bosman, whose legal fight against UEFA changed the face of European football, is to sue the sport's world governing body, FIFA, for not sanctioning a benefit match for him. Eric Cantona and Diego Maradona are believed to have agreed to play in the match, due to take place in Paris on 14 May.

Brittle kept in place by RFU

Rugby Union
STEVE BALE

The notion, widespread yesterday morning, that the Rugby Football Union was about to reach a settlement of its dispute with England's leading clubs turned to dust last night when the RFU committee balked at moving against the chairman of its executive, Cliff Brittle.

Some members had been considering seeking Brittle's removal as chairman of the RFU's negotiators after his refusal to meet representatives of English Professional Rugby Union Clubs on Wednesday. In the event the challenge was never mounted and instead the committee expressed the hope that Brittle, Bill Bishop, the RFU president, and Donald Kerr, chairman of Epruc, would swiftly meet again to resolve who controls professional club rugby and who takes the money from it.

What progress there has been occurred in Brittle's absence on Wednesday, when Bishop, having been appointed by the executive against Brittle's wishes as independent chairman of the union/club negotiations, decided to proceed without him. By

Wednesday night Bishop was exuding optimism that a settlement was in reach.

Instead, there was a contradictory statement from the RFU last night which both exalted Bishop for effectively going behind Brittle's back and explicitly left Brittle in place. "The Rugby Football Union committee congratulated the president on the progress made in his discussions with Epruc, in particular the continued confirmation that the senior clubs wished to remain in the RFU," it said.

"The committee agreed with the president that a further meeting should be held as soon as possible under his independent chairmanship, with Cliff Brittle and Donald Kerr as leaders of the RFU and Epruc negotiating teams respectively, in order to bring the detail of those negotiations to a speedy conclusion."

Bishop yesterday denied a report that Brittle's supporters were threatening to have Tony Hallatt, the RFU secretary, sacked. Brittle did recently ask Hallatt for details of his contract, as well as that of Michael Humphreys, the RFU's media adviser – scarcely a chairman's vote of confidence.

Cup final previews, page 23

In Monday's 24-page sports section

The final hurdle

With the Premiership season set for a thrilling finish tomorrow, Glenn Moore reports on Manchester United's visit to Middlesbrough and Phil Shear reports from St James' Park as Newcastle United take on Tottenham Hotspur. Pipe reports from the all the other Premiership games and the decisive matches in the English First Division. Ken Jones on what has been a memorable year and what was the Season that was, our special guide to the last nine months.

Best of the action

On a major weekend of sport, reports from all the key events, including: Steve Bale and Tim Glover at rugby union's two big cup finals; David Tremayne at the San Marino Grand Prix; Richard Edmondson at Newmarket for the 1,000 and 2,000 Guineas; Derek Pringle at Arundel for the Indian cricketers' traditional curtain-raiser; John Roberts at Newcastle for the Davis Cup; Guy Hodgson at the World Snooker Championship in Sheffield.

In tomorrow's Independent on Sunday

Tomorrow's Independent on Sunday, Simon O'Hagan talks to the captain of India at the start of their cricket tour. Simon O'Hagan on Alex Ferguson, the Manchester United manager, and the range of great English footballers. English football's greatest ever player, Sir Alex Ferguson, on his life and career. The story of the world's most famous footballer, Sir Alex Ferguson, on his life and career. The story of the world's most famous footballer, Sir Alex Ferguson, on his life and career.

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No. 2976, Saturday 4 May

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SYNTHETIC
PROBABLE
RADIO
BREADFAST TABLE
OVER SCOURGEOUS
MEGOTIAABLE
CANYON
ESTIMORE

Last Saturday's Solution

SADNESS
TO BE A
B A I L M U I
B E R R I T
N A P I N
A B P E A N
C A B E C A
M O O D
H Y P E R S E N T I E R

ACROSS

- Cave could yield such a camp spot (10)
- Rough gin, one in hard stuff, is virulent (9)
- Play from one on the wing (4)
- Constable's unfinished work? (6)
- Faint and fall short in contest (8)
- College outside American station (6)
- Imp without name, right – one on the run? (8)
- Manufacture of river tackle (8)
- Points brought to a head in issue (6)

- The man's height, I see, is noteworthy (8)
- Having a dreary track record, perhaps (2,1,3)
- Resin slip and second of collars (4)
- Article on Poe run off soon after (9)
- For Channel 4, 'e's prolific (10)

DOWN

- Astute in manner, set up cordial right away (9)
- Male worker's quit firm (4)
- Animal, creature East European raised (6)
- Sort of acid emphy's reduced (5)

- Eject, showing the gate (7)
- To deprive of bread about done is teasing (10)
- Short man's bluffs (6)
- Resin enclosed, one stocked by painter no end (10)
- Not heartfelt, cine siren's acting (9)
- There could be many a brush with this type (8)
- I spread awful gloom (7)
- Summary entails a point about British game (6)
- There's nothing, nothing like an egg (5)
- That's the spirit, climbing in Derbyshire peaks (4)

THE FRANKLIN SCRAMBLE

Make the longest word you can from GLENNHODDLE Yesterday's Scramble: REARRANGE

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The first correct solution to this week's puzzle opened next Thursday with a Franklin Bookman Dictionary and Thesaurus worth £100. Answers and the winner's name will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, P.O. Box 4018, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5BL. Please use the box number and postcode and give your own postcode. Last week's winner was: Mrs J Gibson, Morpeth, Northumberland



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